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LIFE AND LETTERS

continuing The London Mercury
edited by Robert Herring

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EDITORIAL

July, 1949

IN *The Times* for 11th June there appeared the statement that 'Experiments which have been in progress in this country and the United States since the end of the war to produce an efficient mechanical "brain" have been successfully completed at Manchester University, where a workable "brain" has been evolved.' So, among news of strikes, elections, devaluation and a ship steaming to Las Palmas with an escaped jaguar roaming the decks, is history declared. We are so constantly being told that such-and-such an event marks the End of an Era, the Break-Up (or -Down) of Civilization, a Change in the Social Order, that the period in which we live may well seem to be one of ends and peaces; but here, if ever, is the heralding of a New Age—granted, of course, that the word 'age' is applicable to anything which becomes obsolete and out of date so quickly as a machine. This newest one is 'not only working satisfactorily but for the first time a machine has been brought to the point at which it can work out problems which it is practically impossible to execute on paper', and 'it has just completed in a matter of weeks, a problem, the nature of which is not disclosed, which was started in the seventeenth century and is only just being completed by human calculation.'

This 'mechanical mind' was built by Professor F. C. Williams, of the Department of Electro-Technics, and is now in the hands of two mathematicians, Professor M. H. A. Newman and Mr. A. W. Turing. It may be noted that it is in their hands, instead of vice versa; how long this may continue, it is too early to tell, but Mr. Turing has already stated that the university of Manchester is 'really interested in the investigation of the possibilities of machines for their own sake' (a somewhat dreary interest, surely?) and that 'research would be devoted to finding the degree of intellectual activity of which a machine was capable and to what extent it could think for itself.'

When we consider to what extent, or lack of it, the human intellect can think for itself, it may be permissible to detect behind the gravity of the scientist a slight sense of fun at the expense of the interlocutor, and the same hint of leg-pulling seems suggested by the words 'We have to have some experience with the machine before we really know its capabilities.' However, already Mr. Turing does 'not see why it should not enter any one of the fields normally covered by the human intellect and eventually compete on equal terms'.

It seems to me significant that the verb chosen should be 'compete' rather than 'co-operate', but I suppose if one is going to investigate 'the possibilities of machines for their own sake' rather than for ours, competition is about all the human intellect can expect. But not 'on equal terms'. How can a man ever be equal to a machine, or a machine to a man? The terms can only be measured as 'output' or 'intake', which are our own degraded terms for what used to be called achievement, and achievement is ultimately only to be measured by purpose, by conscious motive. Even when a machine has achieved motive it will be of a different nature from ours and so cannot be equal, there being considerable difference, shall we say, in the development of the materials of which each is made.

Those who make, or temporarily control, machines need not necessarily be possessed of that vision which might alone put them to good uses. No doubt slightly carried away by his mechanical brain, Mr. Turing does 'not think you can even draw the line about sonnets, though the comparison is perhaps a little bit unfair because a sonnet written by a machine will be better appreciated by another machine'—as is, indeed, already the case with mass-selling fiction, turned out by machines to the specification of other machines, who devour it. That is using the word machine perhaps a little figuratively, but taking Mr. Turing's words for what they would seem to be worth, we may at this point step in to inquire why a machine should write a sonnet. The particular need in us which is satisfied by the writing and the reading of a sonnet 'would, surely, take another form with mechanical brains, even if by the time they could write they were equipped with

EDITORIAL

mechanical hearts. By that time, no doubt, there would be other machines which would cut out the need for writing sonnets and simply produce the set of vibrations, impulses, reactions, what you will, at present caused solely by poetry or any other form of art . . . though we by then may be expected to have become machines ourselves. . . .

As yet, we have not perfected that process and as the element of error enters into human calculations, I have to confess that I have not been able to complete the Italian number in time for this issue, as planned. We are printing the poems in translation, with the Italian text alongside. Both printing and proof-reading have to be more careful than usual. The number is therefore postponed until August when it will appear as announced on the inside back cover.

WRITING AND CANADA

RALPH GUSTAFSON

CONTEMPORARY Canadian writing justifies much more interest than it receives. Canadians themselves often fail to realize the excellent work that is being done. With our attention and energies largely directed toward establishing a materially prosperous nation, we sometimes do not see the need to pause for that appraisal of what we are doing which is in the provision of the arts. Without a long or acknowledged cultural tradition exerting its pressure upon us, we are inclined to forget that it is culture alone which justifies the existence of the nation we are building. There's a story which typifies the lack of attention by Canadians to their own writers. Seven years ago, Frederick Philip Grove—one of Canada's substantial novelists—was forced to work in a canning factory for a livelihood. While on the job, he met an aristocratic-looking elderly man, a fellow graduate of Oxford. 'How did you get here?' Grove asked him. The fellow-labourer after a momentary hesitation, said the single word, 'Drink.' Then the man looked at Grove and asked, 'And you?' 'Literature,' Grove replied.

But however indifferent Canadians allow themselves to be at times about their own culture, I still think it permissible to deplore the almost complete lack of interest outside our own boundaries. The editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* recently rejected an article on contemporary Canadian writing. He declared that such a discussion held 'less than eager interest' for readers on his side of the border. One of the editors of *The Saturday Review of Literature* added the gratuitous comment that 'to attempt to have a Canadian literature separate from the culture of the United States seems to be a useless venture.' It is not our pride which is nettled by such opinion, our intelligence is insulted. First of all, there is the implicit arrogance. Secondly, we have a body of writing salted with its own savour. Thirdly, and perhaps most important,

no Canadian artist worth his salt is in the least aware of attempting to segregate Canadian culture when he creates—let alone painting Canadian moustaches on other people's pictures. The Canadian writer is expressing what he finds. And what he finds is that he is a Canadian, and satisfactorily enough, he is finding that being a Canadian is something different from being an American, an Englishman, or a Frenchman. That is inevitable since a Canadian, among other things, is something of all three. Comments that blandly wipe Canadian culture off the agenda are well calculated to make the Canadian bridle—for the simple reason that the intelligent Canadian realizes that the charge that his country has no distinguishable culture is tantamount to telling him that he has no country.

It is sometimes assumed by those who do not read Canadian writing, that Canada is in some sort of 'cultural isolation.' The truth of the matter is that Canadian authors have never been more aware of the cultural patterns in other countries and less inclined to be content with imitation of them. They are sensitive to the world they live in, but their appraisal is their own and is made in terms of themselves as Canadians. Enough time has elapsed, enough history has been lived through, enough self-identification has grown up, to allow the Canadian author—whether he be conscious of it or not—to write out of his own culture and to leave his work distinguished by the perspective and values of the country of which he is a part. As immediate evidence, among much else, I would exhibit the poetry of Earle Birney in *The Strait of Anian* and of A. M. Klein in *The Rocking Chair*; the prose of Hugh MacLennan in *The Precipice* and of Roger Lemelin in *Les Plouffes*.

Canada's evolution from colonialism to nationhood has been slow. It was the product of our own special history and geography—to a great extent a history of circumspect opposition to tangential forces and a geography which allowed up to the present century only a moderate momentum. But however these factors determined our growth, it is now abundantly clear that they carried with them most fortunate compensations. These compensations supply the answers for

the definition of the distinction which marks the Canadian people and their culture from that of other countries—particularly that of the great nation in most intimate proximity, the United States.

With cultural roots in the old world, Canada is of the new. Affected by the powerful catalyst of the nation below her southern boundary, she is yet the stable quotient of other processes. There has been time enough for the Atlantic to establish perspective, and there is distance enough to safeguard originality. Canada is high enough on the globe to have ensured for her, energy and fortitude with discipline.

These factors stamp her literature.

Canadians have a great responsibility to the position and heritage which they have been given. Mr. Hugh MacLennan, Canada's most distinguished novelist, was recently impelled to advise Canadian writers to adhere not to 'the decaying Renaissance culture of Europe' but to the American 'cultural pattern to which they belong'. There is wisdom in this to the extent that Canadians by nature are North Americans. But it is a mistake to declare that culture in western Europe has become 'a deep layer of soft mud from which the clean spring water has poured away'. I do not think it is forcing Mr. MacLennan's position unreasonably to suspect evidence of 'the new colonialism'. This is that equally harmful colonialism which 'cannot forget that the British connection once involved colonial subordination, and would willingly demonstrate independence of Britain by avowing dependence upon the United States.' One need not throw the helve after the hatchet. It is not only more rewarding but natural to admit the forces of tradition, to advise Canadian writers on the contrary to 'fuse with their own convictions that which they consider relevant from both cultures'. Any objective examination of contemporary Canadian writing will soon show that the maturing of Canadian culture 'does not mean that Canada has become more American in her relations to the rest of the English-speaking world, but rather that she has become more Canadian, in relation alike to the United States and to other countries.'

If present Canadian writing is worth anything at all, it

should present the answer to what is meant by 'more Canadian'. At least, part of the answer—for it's only narrow-headed to demand specific answers to such subtle and complex questions. There is vastly more to Canada than her present literature would suggest. But the quality is there—in the poetry, the novels, the short stories which Canadian writers have produced in the past twenty years—differentiating qualities, or, to sound less aloof, that combination of degrees of general human qualities, which stamp Canadians as such.

A quality which any examination will reveal, is humour. The evidence is abundant enough to disprove any allegation that Canadians are a 'dour and brooding people.' We aren't. And Stephen Leacock, of happy living memory, is by no means the only literary evidence. I don't mean that the representative Canadian author can be typed as a 'humorous writer'. There are Canadian books, from *Sam Slick* to *Sarah Binks*, which are specifically humorous. But I refer to something else. The *quality* of humour—which so pervades Canadian writing that one must conclude it to be indigenous. Its presence does not mean that the book or story is 'funny'. It is a quiet pervasive humour, the kind that is cognizant of the follies and foibles of human beings and can be affectionate about them. It is neither condescending nor dependent on circumstantial contrivance. It is a good quality to have—one that seems rarer by the hour.

It determines a further quality which I think Canadians possess: poise. To smile at ourselves and with our neighbours one has to be objective. There is little in Canadian writing that is bitter or sullen or introverted. To put it in a negative way, Canadians, if Canadian writing is a valid reflection, aren't sorry for themselves. The Canadian writer shows himself poised without being conservative; objective without being dehydrated. One often wishes he'd become impassioned, but one seldom has to squirm because he's sentimental.

This grace of objectivity has (so far) enabled the Canadian writer to escape the prevalent tendency to become fascinated with one's own insides. He seems instinctively (for commercially there is plenty of reason to do otherwise) to realize that one pathological case doesn't explain the whole hospital.

He is as disturbed and socially anxious as the next one, and he may be as neurotic, but his product has restraint and perspective. He regards the search for reality as a crucial implication of his own person but not as melodrama. He is unusually free of the current delusion that 'reality' means *only* that which is dislocated, morbid, sinister, and monetary. As if understanding, goodwill, and compassion did not exist.

I do not imply that the Canadian writer is two feet in heaven. But I do say that the best of him is distinctively alive. There is reason to believe that he will not remain unnoticed at home or ignored abroad.

ENGLAND'S LATTER-DAY FLATEARTHISTS

(The Story of a Correspondence)

OSWELL BLAKESTON

BELIEF is habit hard to change. When a belief is fashionable, it does not matter how much evidence to disprove the concept accumulates—witness the people who still talk of ‘a war to end wars’; but once the habit has been changed, believers of yesterday regard as demented those who prefer to cling to the emotion of the old fashion. There is nothing so intolerant as habit of belief, in spite of the fact that we live in a world where anything may be simultaneously proved and disproved. When I heard Professor Eddington lecture to an inner circle, he said, ‘Gentlemen, let us take two random points in a field of probability scatter.’ From that premise we arrived at a formula which determined the exact number of molecules in the universe. ‘At any rate,’ the professor replied to a heckler, ‘this is a more accurate estimate than any which has previously been made.’

Habit of belief, current speculation, has exiled the guesses of the Flatearthists. To-day people might refuse to credit the fact that there are contemporary adults who protest the earth is flat and not a globe or an orange. Well, how many living Flatearthists are there? I think you’d be certain to underestimate, unless, of course, you happen to be a latter-day Flatearthist yourself.

In the United States there are thousands of upholders of the plane-earth doctrine, and most of them shelter under the protection of The Fortean Society, an ‘international association of philosophers’ who fight for the right of ‘suspended judgment’. This Society, which publishes a startling magazine called *Doubt*, does not confine its membership to pure Flatearthists, but embraces anti-vivisectionists, anti-Wasserman-testers, FBI agents, and poets; on the other hand, ‘many

Forteans embrace ideas so new, fresh, and novel that twelve Eisensteins couldn't 'understand them', and one learned Fortean is working on the theory 'that we have had visitors here from other worlds—perhaps for centuries'. Significantly, the Society uses a thirteen-month calendar.

Then I hold a letter from a correspondent who assures me there is a flourishing Flatearth Movement in South Africa, where the faith was ardently propagated by the late Mr. Thos. Winship, author of *Zetetic Cosmogony*.

But in England?

Unfortunately for psychologists, anthropologists, historians, journalists, and true believers there is at present no native organization uniting Flatearthists. There is a representation of The Fortean Society in Liverpool, and the magazines *To-morrow* (published by King, Littlewood, and King) and *The Monthly Science Review* (Alcoyne Publications) have proved themselves favourably disposed towards heterodox opinions, including both flat and concave earth theories; but all research and inquiries relating to an organized Society, operating in England today, have, finally, to be filed in the department of dead ends.

It is possible that the Mugglestonians, followers of The Prophet of Walnut Tree Yard, Ludowichi Muggleston, are still established; but it has been found impossible to confirm this hope since, as headquarters were destroyed during the blitz, there remains no link between old records and contemporary possibilities. But the Mugglestonians did maintain belief in the Flat Earth in company with other dogmas, such as the opinion that Hell will not exist until the Last Day when this earth will become Hell for the unrepentant, an explanation which has led those outside the Faith to speculate whether The Last Day is already an event of the past. All Mugglestonian tenets, however, were held with great tenacity, and disciples who recanted and attributed some curve to the earth's surface were liable to receive through the post a letter informing them, in official and no uncertain terms, of their damnation. Such *lettres de cachet* were a potent weapon for intimidation, yet the irreverent might imagine one of the elders saying to his secretary, 'Oh, Miss Jones, take a letter to Mr. Smith . . .'

Somehow it seems unlikely that the Mugglestonians survived the blasting of London: it is far more incredible to believe that they survived until then, seeing that they were first established in fifteenth-century England.

The Universal Zetetic Society, founded in London in December, 1883, also could not compete with the upheaval of Armageddon Number Two. In his time Dr. Samuel B. Rowbotham, who, under the pseudonym of 'Parallax', wrote *The Earth Not A Globe; An experimental enquiry into the true figure of the earth, proving it a plane* (Day and Son of Paternoster Square), was the moving spirit of zetetic astronomers; while sponsors included Joseph Chamberlain and E. J. Shackleton, and the president was Lady E. A. M. Blount. Lady Blount was an active worker, and I hold a letter from a gentleman who remembers that his cousin, who translated the complete bible into shorthand to be published in fortnightly parts, was commissioned by her ladyship to draw a map of the world with the North Pole in the centre. 'I remember,' my correspondent writes, 'the map was embellished in each corner with bible texts or quotations such as "He hath founded it upon the Seas and Established it".' Nevertheless, in spite of all Lady Blount's endeavours, the Zetetics languished; and I have been in correspondence with the daughter of 'Parallax', 'the one surviving member of his family,' only to find that she herself is anxious to learn if any new organized body has appeared to carry on 'the work'.

We must take it, then, that there is no longer a centralized Society in England; but this does not mean there is any lack of sincere believers. I know, for I have received letters from a great number. Had it been practical, it would have been a joy to have answered all those letters in person, to have travelled round the country and discussed with living Flat-earthists their experiments and variations on fundamental theories, and in particular I would have liked to have heard a certain lady play for me 'that very jolly tune' *The Earth Not A Sphere, Valse*.

How did I come to acquire this curious postbag? I wrote a letter to a leading daily and to a leading Sunday newspaper seeking information, and the response was amazing, although

not all the letters I received were untinged by asperity. I am still uncertain of the intention of the correspondent who replied: 'Dear Sir, I was about to write in response to your appeal for news of Flatearthists, when it struck me that, as I did not know the name of the man, the anecdote would be valueless. However, if the fact there *was* one in 1921 or 22 is of interest, you may have it. Yours faithfully . . . etc. PS.—My husband tells me that his father thought the earth was flat, but he thinks only because others thought it round. Not very helpful!' Yes, not very helpful; and one wonders if it was meant to be very kind.

The printed material sent me by a certain sect proved, in some ways, less ambiguous. At first I found it difficult to decipher a picture of a man, in his shirt sleeves, holding on high a paraffin lamp in his bedroom, especially as the only caption is a cryptic 'TAKEN-LEFT'. On studying the rest of the literature, though, I was able to perceive that this illustration is of another apocalyptic moment: the man is looking for his wife who has been 'taken' (she being among the elect) while he (poor sinner) is 'left' to face judgment on earth. There is a trace of Muggleton here, although this church has another allegiance. Finally, I realized pamphlets and picture had been sent me as a warning not to present myself as an apostle of Flatearthism: the Church, looking forward like so many of the smaller sects to The Last Day, is ready to chastise 'seducing spirits' who are expected to arise in the last hours with false words and 'doctrines of the devil' such as the plane-earth gospel. So, after admonition, I was relieved to find the same post brought me letters from two vice-admirals who take a more lenient view of modern Flatearthism, one enclosing for me a map showing plainly how 'very much more convenient for navigators' is the flat earth than the sphere: on the plane-earth supposition, many countries and places are often found to be much closer together than people otherwise imagine.

But however mixed my post—and some correspondents played a most cautious game, endeavouring to discover my convictions before committing themselves—there can be no doubt that Flatearthism is accepted by many adults in England in 1949.

It may seem ungracious to speak about the average age of my correspondents, but deductions are scientific rather than impertinent; and it is perhaps only fair to the reader to put on record the fact that many letters seemed to be from charming old gentlemen. They are often full of such expressions as 'the same' and dark hints that the fallacious claims of Globists are based 'on Roman Catholic foundations'. The truth is that the ultimate hey-day for Flatearthists in this country came at the turn of the century. Then many unusual visitors stayed at the Hotel in Downham with the intention of experimenting on the straight run of water on the canal. (It would indeed be fascinating to visit that hotel and see if any legends linger.) Then many contemptuous prizes were offered by the wealthy and devout to those who could really prove the earth a sphere (Mr. Wilbur Glenn Volvia offered in dollars the equivalent sum of £2,000 for one proof that the earth is a globe and later a much larger sum to any aviator who would fly round 60° north latitude and 60° south latitude and prove them the same distance), and many intricate law cases resulted from Flatearthists refusing to accept an arbitrator's decision. And it was approximately at this time that the last real flush of Flatearth literature was published, although many of these works were reprinted in the early twenties.

Sceptical readers may ask how it was, and is, possible for anyone living in the twentieth century to accept the plane-earth hypothesis. It might be well, then, to glance at some of the publications of the latter-day Flatearthists, for these are still the textbooks of contemporaries. We will not concern ourselves overmuch with the religious controversy, such as the argument from the text 'Every eye will see God descending at the last day' and the contention that such visibility would be impossible for all mankind if the earth were spheroid. Neither, I think, need we pay too much attention to the apologists who maintain Globism is purely verbal. There is a too slick air about the proposition which asserts that the round shape was chosen by force of analogy—the idea being that we already think of so many things as globes 'including drops of water'; and there is far too much sophistication in the notion that the globe was conjured into being in order to escape from the

complexities of the ancient belief that 'the whole of heaven rose and fell with the sun'. Let us, instead, take the 'plain facts' as they are put forward in a typical book, a typical map, a typical leaflet.

But just before we pass to print we ought, perhaps, to pause to recapture something of the immediate historical background. We should recall that English engineers had refused to construct the Suez Canal 'thinking it impossible to hold up huge sandbanks because of the curvature of the earth'. M. de Lesseps, who finally accepted responsibility for cutting the canal, 'ignored the ball theory' and successfully completed the work. Afterwards, an Act of Parliament was passed 'prohibiting anyone making allowance for the supposed curvature of the earth in the construction of railways and canals'. Many of my correspondents are still immensely indignant about this Act. One of them writes: 'Just fancy asking Railway Engineers and Constructors of Canals to *assume the earth is flat* and on that hypothesis base their computations, while at the same time they say: "We know it is not flat, but if you want to tender you must base your calculations on this theory."' My correspondent asserts that in consideration of this duplicity, the 'scientific schoolmen' are discredited for ever.

Nonetheless, let us examine print for further proof, refutation, and witness.

I have inspected the notepaper of the late Mr. William Edgell, author of *Does The Earth Rotate?* (illustrated), and found it headed by a picture of a nostalgic Victorian greenhouse: Mr. Edgell was, in fact, 'a horticultural builder'. His treatise on Flatearthism is a latter-day classic. The title page of his book, which he himself first published in 1914 and reprinted in 1919 and 1927, claims the author to be inventor of: The Free-Wheel For Bicycles, The Automatic Weighing Machine, The Coin Fred Machine, The Airless Tyre, etc.; although one of my cynical correspondents demands, 'Could Mr. Edgell really have given us the free-wheel?'

In the first chapters of *Does The Earth Rotate?* the author deals with the nonsense of a rotating globe. He asks the reader to set up in his garden, on a fixed tripod, a tube three-quarters of an inch in diameter and 3 feet 6 inches long. (It is a great

point with our builder of greenhouses that if a man cannot prove the earth is flat in his own back garden, there is something wrong with common sense.) This fixed tube is to be directed at the fixed Pole Star. Now, whenever the observer goes to look through his fixed tube at the fixed Pole Star, he will find the tube is in perfect alignment. How could this be if the earth were a globe rotating at some preposterous speed? And if you ask how then is the earth fixed, to what is it fixed? Mr. Edgell neatly replies: 'We all agree the Pole Star must be a fixture, to what is *it* fixed?' He next proceeds to point out that the so-called stationary sun cannot be viewed like the stationary Pole Star. Is it not reasonable to believe that the earth is stationary and the sun travels across it?

Here, indeed, is a trap! And by the time we have reached chapter seven, and noticed a man standing upside down in New Zealand, the author feels entitled to say: 'Now if the reader was playing a game of drafts and he found himself in the position that he could not make another movement without losing the game, he would give his opponent credit for having won the game. I therefore rely on the reader giving me credit for proving my case.'

Elated, Mr. Edgell is quick to emphasize his victory, to show that phenomena associated with the sun can be explained by the shape of the flat earth. We must understand that the sun is lower in the heavens than conventional astronomers allow; and now the sun, continually travelling and varying its course from time to time, passes from our sight behind mountains which, if transparent, would not prevent us from watching the friendly fire on its distant flight. But the earth is not flat enough! there are mountains and valleys, and so we have day and night and the seasons. Then 'the outside edge of the earth may stand much higher than the highest mountain or observatory known to us; the sun can, therefore, be easily hidden from our view, by night in England, while at the same time, the sun may be on view, sideways or otherwise, in other countries, or *vice-versa*'.

This brings us inevitably to fascinating speculations about the shape of our flat earth. Mr. Edgell says: 'It is reasonable to conclude that the shape of the earth resembles a plate

surrounded by intensely cold regions, which makes it impossible for any living creature to exist there.' The borderland is one of ice hedges because, in space beyond the edges, there is no means for the sun's heat to be stored. 'Truth,' as believers are fond of remarking, 'will always win'; and Mr. Edgell frequently makes this assertion in large black capitals.

In chapter ten the author tackles accusations which are frequently hurled to silence latter-day Flatearthists. One of these is the business of the hull of a ship disappearing first over the horizon. The conventional claim the vanishing hull as sure proof that the sea is curved. 'But,' writes Mr. Edgell, 'let us introduce a telescope and we shall be able to sight the vessel again. If, therefore, one may continue this observation of the vessel by the aid of a *telescope*, then the illustration put forward by astronomers *falls to the ground*. Were it the curvature causing the obstruction, the telescope would be useless as the reader will readily grasp.' The author suggests the optical illusion of the vanishing hull is due in part to the 'ever-prevailing mist on the surface of the ocean', to the swell which may mask the hull, and 'to the varying angle at which the observer may be sighting it as the vessel travels farther away'. Moreover, the author hints that Globists rather unfairly assume the observer is always looking down the alleged curve of the earth, when he might quite well sometimes be looking up it—and then would one expect the hull to disappear first?

Cogent polemics, but it is here that Mr. Edgell makes his most striking departure from the formulae of other latter-day text books in so far as he ignores perspective. This argument is too 'popular' to be omitted altogether from our survey; so we may perhaps cast one sideglance at another work, Frederick H. Cook's *The Terrestrial Plane or The True Figure of the Earth* (Wiseman, 1908). Mr. Cook makes much use of perspective, and shows how, to an observer on the shore, the sky will appear to slope down and the sea to slope up. Now the masts of ships are some 200 feet above the sea level and the hull a mere 40 feet; in consequence, the hull disappears first from the visual field held within the approaching lines of perspective.

To return to Mr. Edgell and the Flatearthist's reply to a disastrous experiment on the canal. In the original experiment,

stakes were planted at intervals along the straight stretch of canal water, and then viewed through a telescope. The intention was to show that the alignment of the tops of the stakes would reveal no curvature of the earth's surface. Unfortunately, Mr. John Hampden lost a £500 wager to Mr. A. R. Wallace, although the money was not paid till after sixty-seven years when both parties had practically ruined themselves in the courts. The Flatearthist view, after the experiment had been made, was that the upward divergence of equal poles placed at intervals was doubtlessly due to the magnifying power of the telescope. In any case, the original experiment was conducted in a most haphazard manner, without proper attention to scientific safeguards: but it left an uncomfortable stigma.

Once again, Lady Blount took up her role as champion: she arranged for a new experiment which would wipe off the memory of the old. The new experiment, undertaken in 1904, was carried out by means of 'a specially constructed and costly apparatus': a photograph was taken, from a distance of six miles, of a large sheet drawn across the smooth surface of the canal and held up at right angles to the surface of the water. 'The whole sheet was shown in the picture as was the shadow that was cast on the water by the sheet. *To obtain this result the water must have been absolutely level.*' The curvature, as proposed by the orthodox, should have been some 8 inches in the mile.

In chapter eleven the author boldly approaches the tricky business of the alleged circumnavigation of the globe. Mr. Edgell does not brush this difficulty aside with the firmness of another writer who remarked: 'The Isle of Wight is often circumnavigated—but no one calls that a globe.' The designer of glasshouses faces the problem squarely by reminding his readers that 'Astronomers contend one may commence a journey from London travelling due East and ultimately return to starting point.' What actually happens to a traveller who imagines he circumnavigates the globe is that 'he passes the point known as the *North Pole and Star* by which the *compass functions*, in consequence of which the compass must point back.' So 'when the traveller *reaches Japan* the direction

he takes cannot be Eastward, or else the compass would be useless'. How mariners have deluded themselves is graphically explained in a number of diagrams.

Chapter twelve contains a somewhat alarming pen drawing of 'Aeroplane one mile from earth dropping a bomb on my house'. 'This is another illustration of the unreasonable theory of a rotating globular earth. . . . It takes about ten seconds for a bomb to reach the building from an aeroplane one mile up. Multiply eighteen miles by ten and it will give you the distance which the house will have travelled with the earth according to Astronomers; as readers will observe, the bomb would pitch 100 miles distant from the house. Is the rotation theory compatible with reason?' The aeroplane is followed by a parallel example of a weight dropping from a 100 foot chimney; the weight is found directly under the chimney and not seventy-two miles distant from it. And let it be marked that Mr. Edgell is ready with an answer for those who say the atmosphere is whizzed round with the absurdly spinning globe: 'An object can be dropped in an enclosed railway carriage, travelling at its maximum speed, and it will fall vertically, because the air is carried along inside the carriage. But if an object is thrown up, say, twenty-four feet high from an open truck travelling equally as fast, it will drop at a considerable distance to the rear.' Apodeictically, then, the air is not travelling with the earth!

Chapter thirteen is devoted to a refutation of Foucault's Pendulum which 'Astronomers and school books assert to be a sure proof of the earth's rotation.' A heavy ball was suspended from the roof of the Pantheon in Paris on a wire 200 feet in length. This pendulum was set swinging and, after a time, the experimenters declared that the path of the pendulum had deviated from its original course. Such deviation seemed, to the supporters of rotation, to be sufficient proof; but Edgell pertinently demands: 'If the apparent circular course taken by the ball, after it was set in motion, was the result of the earth's rotation, why was it necessary to start it? and why did it not oscillate perpetually?'

In chapter fourteen the author demolishes the Law of Gravitation which is no more than a fable required by those

who would have sané men believe that their fellow kind can walk on the earth in the manner of flies on a ceiling. 'It is quite unnecessary to use the term "Law of Gravitation" when we know that bodies heavier than air must fall to the earth.' There are many lines elaborated to show the law superfluous, including an illustration of a man gently blowing cigar smoke against a cold sheet of glass in winter time. 'Due to the low temperature, the smoke becomes dampened and incidentally slightly heavier than air, giving it a tendency to *descend*. It dries very quickly, however, and becomes lighter than air again, and consequently *ascends* into the air when it has passed under the sheet of glass . . . A scientist remarked, "I fear you have not studied the Law of Gravitation, for everything has a tendency to fall to the ground, by the attraction of the earth." I put it to him if his contention was correct, why did the smoke ascend instead of descending as the cigar would if let fall?'

The final chapter discusses eclipses of the moon: 'It is well known that there are dark bodies in the heavens, and periodical movements of such bodies would create phenomena similar to what we understand as the eclipse of the moon.'

I have treated Mr. Edgell's work at length for several reasons. One is that books by latter-day Flatearthisists are hard to come by, unless the searcher is lucky enough to be able to borrow a copy—a very treasured copy—from a contemporary believer. Museums are not helpful, although the searcher may occasionally come across a copy of an obscure work in a local museum near the town in which the author lived. Again, another reason why I have given rather an extensive review of *Does The Earth Rotate?* is on account of the fact that the contemporary reader, when he does find one of the latter-day textbooks in his hands, may not have the patience to disentangle the threads. A great deal of persistence and care is generally needed to extract the meaning from these books, and Mr. Edgell, alas, is no exception. The latter-day evangelists seem to have written in a ferment of necessity, and to have jotted into the text anything that seemed most urgent at the moment of writing; sometimes this would be a sum for readers with specialized knowledge of mathematics (I have not attempted to cope with Mr. Edgell's ventures in this direction),

and sometimes a text which has relevance only to a thought in the author's mind. Even with my thorough cleaning of the decks, it still remains evident that the strength of latter-day propagandists does not lie in their logical arrangement of material. But we should not allow clumsiness to blind us to the strength of 'irrefutable arguments', although one fears that reviewers were frequently not so balanced. David Wardlaw Scott, author of *Terra Firma—The Earth Not A Planet* (Simpkin Marshall, 1901), was told sharply by the reviewer of the *Standard* that he had 'a gude conceit of himself'—or so I have been informed by the author's grandson-in-law.

Anyway, the dilemmas which perplexed Mr. Edgell are still the puzzles of prime importance to contemporary Flat-earthists. The letters I received are full of speculation regarding the Hampden-Wallace affair and Foucault's pendulum. Our review of the matter in Mr. Edgell's book was essential, in one form or another, in order that the reader should be *au fait* with the position as it is sustained to-day.

A typical book—a typical map.

Of the many maps issued by the latter-day Flat-earthists (the map drawn by James H. Alston for Lady Blount, the de luxe *New Map of the World Zetetic Projection*, etc.), Middleton's *Eclipse and Sunrise Plan of the Flat Earth* (price 3d.) is possibly the fairest example. In an advertisement to the first edition, in 1907, Middleton, 'Late an Officer in H.M.'s Army, Member of the Royal Canoe Club, and Author's Society, London,' states: 'The object of the enclosed Plan of the Earth is not geographical in the sense of details! It is a political and educative ground plan, with excellent distances on the ocean-going route! It is a plan which embodies original features, which have been actually discovered, but are not to be found in Atlases and Maps generally. These features are the Antarctic Midnight Sun, with its setting and rising again immediately—and as seen in 1841, setting due South—instead of Westerly and Easterly as per Globe—and then with hours of Globular time in between. This remarkable Sunset could not occur on a Globe at all, and of course proves the Earth flat! Next follows an Exposition of the Sun's daily route in January, and the Eclipse of January 14th, 1907. The now famous 'all Red Route

to New Zealand' [*via Canada* is added in the author's handwriting on the copy lent to me] 'in 25 days, instead of 38 days as per Globe, can easily be traced by anyone holding the Plan. This Route is impossible on a Globe, and proves the Earth flat at once. This plan also delineates Genesis, chapter 1, for the first time in the history of the World. I am, Middleton.'

The second edition prints an advertisement of 'Two Amazing Discoveries'. 'The first amazing discovery was that England is the heart of the Earth, with the longitudes from the clock at Greenwich; thus Greenwich is the centre and the longitudes radiate from it! There is absolutely nothing for the North Pole to do, as neither latitude nor longitude depends on it. Latitude north of Greenwich can be counted two ways—Nautically towards a North Pole; but more correctly Geographically—North of Greenwich.'

(It is a good thing Mr. Middleton never saw a Flatearth map which has been described to me by a correspondent. In this map the world was circular in plan with a flat surface, the main axis being the Mediterranean while all outside the circle was designated the infernal regions; and the British Isles were in the infernal regions.)

'The Second Amazing Discovery was that Sunrise on March 21st is due East from St. Leonards, England, instead of 3,000 miles further South! The Sun is then at 6 a.m. on the Equator: thus the Equator is due East from St. Leonards, England, on March 21st. This is conclusive that the Earth is flat and small also! Again the sun is found to be only 3,437 miles above the Earth, by the Navigator's Sextant, and two other methods in addition.' [Mr. Edgell reckoned the sun is some 10 miles in diameter; although, with a certain humility, he added: 'There is, of course, no means of measuring it.']

Mr. Middleton follows these 'amazing' statements with some of the more complex arguments about eclipses, and how Navigators may sail 'as it were round a South Pole', and what is more, he believes his hypotheses are confirmed by observations of Commander Scott. However, in case this reasoning should not prove shattering, he marshals a final cavalcade of evidence: 'In addition, all photographs of Still Water prove the Earth flat, as do Paintings of Lake Scenery, collections of

Fleets and Battle Pieces, with millions of Pictorial Postcards of Seaside Views, Ornamental Ponds, and Lake Scenery.'

The third edition of the Plan (1908) contains additional information in the advertisement: 'The fastest courses by Racing Clippers between Liverpool and Melbourne and between similar Latitudes such as 40° South to 40° South, have had a remarkable tendency to large circular routes—and running into higher Latitudes, such as 52°; and shaping the route as a half-circle. These routes are pursued because the Navigator can thus secure a strong fair wind all the way—and also brings the wind abeam—and thus make his passage in 60 days to Melbourne. These circular routes have been misunderstood, and have been called great circles on a Globe—which they are not! . . . The position of New Zealand can easily be proved by the failure of the Panama Canal to provide a route; that Canal is useless to England simply because New Zealand lies North, about, and not South-West as per Globe.'

A typical book, a typical map—a typical leaflet.

Perchance one, which was sent to me by a correspondent and is headed 'FLAT EARTH AND SEA', is to be numbered among the last attempts. The anonymous writer begins: 'It is an old saying and a true one, that water always finds its level of its own accord. If so, the *surface* of the water at the landing Sea-port of Bristol and London are on an *absolute level* less the few feet on height of tides, with New Zealand.' He proceeds: 'The school book gives the highest point of land above Sea level in England and Wales as 3,000 feet, and that of New Zealand as 5,000 feet. Instead of New Zealand being underneath England, you will see that it stands higher by 2,000 feet.' [Ah, but it is becoming difficult to think of New Zealand at all; however . . .] 'May I ask, should not these heights of *land above* Sea level of England and New Zealand convince you without a shadow of doubt, that the *Earth* to all intents and purposes is *flat* and *not* the shape of an *orange* or *globe*.' The writer then plunges into rather abstruse calculation to show 'the *Equator* for habitation *does not exist*'. In conclusion, he quotes from an unspecified London Daily Paper, January, 1928: 'The expected Comet prophesied by over 1,000 Astronomers to appear about the 17th December, 1927, did not take place at

all, and they were all' wrong! DO *YOU* REALLY THINK THE EARTH ROTATES?'

Possibly the publicists of the latter-day Flatearthists were unsure of their market. One might imagine that, for a throw-away, the appeal should have been made in the style of the writer who stated, quite simply, 'We do not rotate because the Sahara is always dry.'

I think, though, that from their printed words the curious can construct a distinct portrait of the latter-day Flatearthists in England, with all their courage, pertinacity, and idealism. They are, in a sense, artists in so far as they do not trouble to make exact exploitations. Naturally, there are reasons why one cannot talk in too personal a fashion about contemporary believers; but one may perhaps say something about distinguished members of the last generation. For instance, three correspondents sent me their recollections of Ebenezer Breach, of Portsmouth, who lived as a missionary among the unconverted. He made up doggerel rhymes to help children memorize the teaching, and one began: 'The earth's in shape a wedding cake/With icy seas all round.'

One correspondent wrote: 'I can state positively that a lecture of his (or an article upon it) was published in a magazine—*The Strand*, I believe, but am not certain—and that one illustration showed Ebenezer Breach holding a plate in each hand, one above the other, with the subscription "The Prince of Wales was quite convinced".' Another correspondent gave me a report of Ebenezer's ultimate public lecture: 'He was lecturing to an audience in a Portsmouth Hall one evening and had, as usual, a certain amount of apparatus on his platform. His lecture evidently was not too well received, and in the middle of it a number of rowdies, probably youths, made a rush upon his platform and overturned and broke up his precious apparatus.'

Slender material for the biographer . . . yet . . . one can almost see the man!

Another correspondent supplied a ghost of Mr. Perry who lived in Darwen and was nicknamed by his fellow townsmen 'Flat Earth'. He constantly challenged passers-by: 'I remember,' my correspondent writes, 'that he used to cry out to

those who disputed truths, "Seen any brooks running uphill lately?" and go on his way, chuckling loudly to himself . . .'

Really, it is not difficult to agree with the correspondent who holds that men of the Breach and Perry stamp are more endearing than the 'scientific schoolmen' whose chief concern to-day seems to be to change the shape of the world with an atom.

Notwithstanding, it must be confessed there is a darker side to the story of latter-day Flatearthism. This aspect was underlined by a correspondent who told me of a flourishing pseudo-Flatearth Society in Berlin before World War II. Here a specious Flatearthism was artificially encouraged by Nazis who liked to consider wisdom the eternal privilege of enlightened minorities. With indiscriminate snobbery they fostered all brands of bogus occultism, and we can imagine the Institute debating the relevance of canals on Mars to Western Flatearthism. We cannot regret the passing of this Society, but we need not feel that such dark pretensions in any way discredit latter-day Flatearthism in England.

RUM AND ROGUERY— BARBADOS, 1710

S. H. WOOLF

*(With grateful acknowledgment to the Barbados Museum and
Historical Society.)*

FOR our knowledge of the everyday social life of bygone times we owe a great debt to contemporary letterwriters. Their art—now, unfortunately, a lost one—was in its golden age in the eighteenth century. Horace Walpole, Lady Mary Wortley-Montague, Boswell, Fanny Burney—to mention but a few of the most distinguished practitioners of that literary form—have all given us a vivid insight into the manners and customs, mentality and atmosphere of that remarkable period. Yet it would be a serious mistake to ignore the more obscure writers. They, too, have much to offer not only to the *dilettante*, but to the student of history. For those who take the trouble to dig for it a rich lode of treasure lies buried beneath the dusty archives in state museums and libraries. The letters of Thomas Walduck are a striking example of this. Written in the year 1710 from Barbados, they were addressed to his friend, Mr. James Petiver, ‘Apothecary to the Chartreux’ and Fellow of the Royal Society, of Aldersgate Street, London. The writer gives an absorbing account of the life of the white community in Barbados 240 years ago. Certainly, it is not a pretty picture that he paints, for Walduck was nothing if not a realist and a cynic. Nevertheless his letters have an authentic ring, and the fact that he himself had spent fourteen years in the West Indies entitles him to be regarded as an expert on his subject.

Curiously enough, nothing is known of Walduck apart from his letters. Whether sugar-planter, merchant, or lawyer, he gives no indication as to his profession, though one gathers that he was a man of some standing in the island. It is evident that he was highly educated and well versed in history and

the classics. His style is fluent and incisive. He has a keenly critical eye for the foibles of the queer, raffish society amongst which he lived. He is no respecter of persons and, from the Governor downwards, spares nobody who incurs his disapproval. Although he wields a barbed pen his strictures are often leavened by a strong sense of humour. But he hates cruelty and injustice and never fails to denounce them with uncompromising sternness. Both as a historical record and a human document his letters are of considerable value.

Barbados at that time was passing through a bad phase. A third of the land lay uncultivated, many buildings had fallen into ruin and the population, which totalled 81,000—9,000 white and 72,000 slaves—had dwindled seriously. There was a heavy drop in trade. Whereas formerly as many as 800 vessels put into the island annually, during the past five years this number had shrunk to less than 300. Even amongst the white people distress was prevalent and many of them had to be given relief from public funds. For this state of affairs Walduck blames the previous Governor, Sir Bevil Granville, whom he accuses of gross corruption, but the more probable cause was the war with France. Be that as it may, Sir Bevil's successor, notwithstanding the condition of the island, enjoyed an almost viceregal power and magnificence. He lived in palatial state in Government House. Wherever he went he was attended by a bodyguard of horse. In addition, for the purpose of quelling possible internal risings by the white bond-servants and African slaves, he had at his disposal a militia force comprising both mounted and dismounted troops. As for the regular garrison of two cavalry and six infantry regiments, it seems abnormally large, even in time of war, for an island the size of Barbados. To defend it against invasion the whole coastline was strongly fortified and bristling with ordnance. Altogether, it is obvious that the British were running no risk of losing this, the richest of their oversea possessions.

Walduck relates that the plantation owners treated their slaves with extreme cruelty, giving them scarcely enough food to keep body and soul together and working them eighteen hours out of the twenty-four without a break. Indeed, they

took far more care of their horses than of these unfortunates, to whose grinding toil they entirely owed their livelihood. 'It is a common saying amongst the planters that if they give £30 for a Negro and he lives one year he payes for himself.' Walduck has some harsh comments to make on the white people: 'unjust in their words and Dealings one to the other, neither minding Oaths or Imprecations, Horrible profane and lude in their Discourse and conversation, of no moral honesty, of profest religion, hardly think of God but in their curses and blasphemies.' He adds that they not only never attended church on Sundays but that they even petitioned the Governor to allow them to keep their windmills (for crushing the cane) in operation on that day. 'They do not know what Charity is, or do as we would be done unto the poor workman that has earn'd his bread by labour and sweat and shall be paid by menaces and bastinado.' In the same paragraph, condemning the flagrant roguery which was so rife amongst the colonists, he says that the large sums of money bequeathed for the purpose of endowing schools, almshouses and other charitable institutions were in most cases misappropriated by the churchwardens and other trustees.

Even allowing for a measure of exaggeration on Walduck's part, the general standard of honesty in the island must have been appallingly low. When the owner of an estate was obliged by sickness to recuperate his health in England, he had to appoint a manager or attorney to look after the plantation in his absence. Once the owner's back was turned the manager did as he pleased. Pocketing the profits of the estate, he would deliberately run it into debt. The hapless owner, on his return to Barbados, was confronted by his manager with a sheaf of unpaid bills, allegedly incurred on his behalf, which it was impossible for him to check. Unless and until he chose to settle the manager's accounts in full he was legally prevented from re-entering into possession of his estate. Not content with that, these rascals resorted to even baser forms of villainy. They would employ accomplices to keep the newly returned owner out of his bed night after night and, under the guise of hospitality, ply him with large quantities of drink. If the victim were so weak-minded as to fall into the trap, the

chances were that his health would soon break down again under this prolonged course of dissipation. As a result he would be compelled for medical reasons to leave the tropics permanently. Here was the opportunity for which the manager had so cunningly laid his plans. He would induce his ailing victim to sell him the estate in return for a small deposit, partly in cash and partly in bills of exchange, the balance of the purchase price to be paid in England. In the circumstances the owner had no choice but to agree to the terms of the transaction. On arrival in England he would find the bills of exchange to be worthless. As for the balance of the money due to him, he would never receive a penny of this and at that distance there was no hope of enforcing payment from the swindling manager. Stripped of his entire possessions, he would more often than not end his days miserably in a debtors' prison. According to Walduck, this organized racket was widespread and no steps whatever were taken to put a stop to it. He even goes so far as to charge the Governor himself with taking a hand in the game. Whether this was true or not, it was as well for the writer that that autocrat was unaware of the accusation. One can guess that, had he got wind of it, His Excellency would have made things very hot for Mr. Walduck!

He goes on to describe the plight of orphans whose parents' estate had fallen into the clutches of unscrupulous executors. Not more than twenty estates on the whole island, he declares, were in the hands of the lawful heirs and, even then, the eldest brother had cheated the younger children of their share of the patrimony. Bereft of their natural protectors, these unfortunates were left derelict and reduced to beggary.

The debt laws, as enforced in Barbados, must have been peculiarly harsh. Walduck cites several instances of this. A plantation owner, dying intestate, left a property worth £10,000. His luckless heirs had to forfeit all claim to this because of debts amounting to not more than £500. In another case the 'intestant', whose estate was valued at £7,000, was in debt to the tune of a mere £200. This provided sufficient pretext for the estate to be administered by an individual who gave the Governor a *douceur* of £700 for the granting of the favour. After seven years the wily administrator, no doubt

in strict accordance with the law, gained sole possession of the estate. In some respects, at least, our modern ethics are an improvement on those of our predecessors!

In other ways also the characters of Walduck's fellow-colonists left much to be desired. His caustic comments are worth quoting. 'The people to Strangers and those that do not live amongst them appear to be noble Spirited Generous and brave but indeed they are naturally covetous pusillanimous and Cruel. They are very fond of new faces and shall make noble treats to Entertain a foreigner from one to the other all over the Island. . . . The first room (of their houses) shall be pretty well furnished when they know of any Stranger Coming if there is as much furniture in ye parish for they shall borrow of all their Neighbours, Chairs of one, Spoons and forks of another . . .' Of their addiction to jobbery and nepotism he observes, 'they are unreasonable fond of Places and Commissions without respect to their age or Qualifications. We have assistant Judges sitts upon the bench that are minors, other Justices of the Peace that cannot write their own names.'

Walduck was no admirer of the fair sex. As a piece of misogamistic propaganda the following is hard to beat. 'If a man dies and leaves his wife sole Executrix she will marry a second Husband (for they are given to the work of the flesh). I know 20 women that have had 5 or 6 husbands a piece. One woman particularly The first husband an Englishman the 2nd a Scotchman, the 3rd an Irishman the 4th a Dutchman & the 5th an Englishman again, and she is alive now and much ado to keep herself a widow. The laws of England gives her $\frac{1}{3}$ of her husband's Estate (Slaves are real Estates here) free from all Incumbrance. And she will make partition take all her dowry to herself the debts and Charges must be paid out of the Remainder that there will be nothing left for the Children. The widow marries again, and they are alwayes so fond of their present husband that she will ruine all the Children she has by the former husbands to oblige him and if he happens to outlive the old trott (*sic*) he makes the Estate all his own tho: it may be made up by the acquisition of 4 or 5 husbands before and they are gone to the Devil to pay the Purchase.' One gathers that the writer himself, forewarned by such

ominous examples, had no difficulty in avoiding the snares of matrimony.

His cynical opinion of women is still further illustrated by an amusing episode which he relates with gusto. The protagonists were two ladies prominent in local society to whom, for the sake of clarity, we will refer to as Mrs. X and Mrs. Y. Rivals of long standing, they missed no opportunity of out-vieing each other. Mrs. X bought herself a piece of richly brocaded silk which she got made up into a modish gown. Attired in this, she attended a ball at which the other lady was also present. At the sight of her rival flaunting her finery in public Mrs. Y, naturally enough, was filled with envy. Determined not to be outdone, she scoured the town for a length of similar material. Eventually she found the shop where Mrs. X had obtained her silk. A small quantity was left which Mrs. Y promptly bought. She then arranged a fashionable party to which she invited Mrs. X. As at the previous function, the latter lady arrived in all the pride and splendour of her new gown. She was received with every mark of friendship by her hostess. Presently, when the room was thronged with people, Mrs. Y summoned her coloured waiting-maid. One can imagine the sensation that the woman's entrance created for she was wearing a dress of identically the same material as Mrs. X's! The shock was too much for that lady. 'She fell into a fitt, went home and unrobed herself and has appeared in nothing but Norwich stuffs ever since.'

Walduck's dry humour is at its best in his descriptions of Barbadian wedding, christening, and funeral customs. All three occasions, as may be supposed, were capital excuses for a carousal. For some reason which Walduck does not explain marriages and baptisms were always solemnized in private houses and never in churches. The officiating clergyman was invariably one of the chief guests. 'After dinner the parson takes a Bermudas Gigg and Dances Cheger foot with Madam Bride all hands gett drunk and ye Vinculated couple go to bed in the fear of the Lord.'

Walduck's remarks on the subject of christenings are very quaint. 'And as we have greater plenty & variety at some time of the year than at other times the poor Infant is kept, if it

should happen to Dye, from being intituled to the kingdom of heaven by Baptism untill the good time comes and the hog is fat.' There follows a formidable list of outlandish viands and fearsome-sounding beverages, some of which are, however, still familiar in Barbados. 'And then we have Corne Shote & Bonivess, a Calipie of Sea Tortoise, a Stude Cofum, and rosted Caberetta & other things baked and barbiqued, with planting, tarts and yam puddings. For fruits wonderfull variety as Chegeis grapes, fat porks, sower sopps and the guavas. Then for liquors we have at these merry times strong Cowjou, sparkling mobby. Humming Parenno, and to crown the feast a lusty bowl of Rum punch (alias kill devil).' Then comes a rather sinister comment on the precariousness of life in a tropical climate. 'The nameing of the Child is done with great thought and concerne for the people are superstitious here . . . and because the Country is sickly & the people apt to Dye, they generally have 3 or 4 Godfathers and God-mothers.'

Unlike the other two ceremonies the funeral service was conducted in church. The mourners surpassed themselves in the lavishness of their hospitality for, as Walduck says, 'their best feasts are always made at their funerals. And there is more good victuall Wine & Ale devoured that day than all the whole parish eats and drinks in a whole month afterwards for if a man dies 5,000 pounds in debt here his Executors will lay out 2 or 300 pounds upon his funeral, and 'tis the first debt paid if he leaves no more behind him.' The scene he proceeds to depict is, to our modern notions of propriety, almost incredible. He relates that a large supply of 'burnt wine' or rum punch was carried to the church as refreshment for—a delightful touch this—'a funeral sermon makes the people squeamish.' After the interment the mourners would sit in the church porch and settle down seriously to celebrate the sad event, smoking their pipes and drinking to the repose of the deceased 'untill they are as drunk of Tinckers and never think of the dead afterwards.' Walduck concludes with a gruesome description of the shocking neglect of the graveyards. 'Hogs has routed up Childrens and Dogs carried away their bones. The town people make fire of the rotten coffins,

the Church porches is a stable for horses, and they lye as promiscuously under ground as they lived above.'

A more decorous affair than the funeral orgies was the annual celebration of the 'Cockney Feast' which was attended by all the merchants and planters who were natives of London. The function, conducted throughout with elaborate ceremonial, began in the morning with a full dress procession to the church. During the service a collection was made, the proceeds of which were devoted to the relief of the poor cockneys in the island. The members of the society then marched solemnly from church to the house provided for the feast, which opened with a fanfare of trumpets. An added dignity was lent to the occasion by the presence of H.E. the Governor as guest of honour. The banquet was on the prodigal scale typical of that period. Loyal toasts to Queen Anne and the Lord Mayor of London were drunk to the accompaniment of a salute of twenty-five guns. Numerous other toasts followed as the prelude to five or six hours of steady drinking or, as Walduck puts it, 'heartly jollity'. Then, 'the wiser and sober (*sic!*) went away, the more generous and bold stay'd behind playing, drinking their friends healths and firing of Guns until 12 at Night.' There must have been a lot of aching heads next day, but no doubt the party was considered well worth it. Our modern club and association dinners seem very tame, milk-and-water affairs compared with the full-blooded carousals so beloved by our predecessors for, even in that hard-drinking age, the British were notorious for their intemperance. 'It is observed,' says Walduck, 'that upon all the New Settlement the Spaniards make the first thing they do is to build a Church the first thing ye Dutch do upon a new Colony is to build them a fort, but the first thing the English doe, be it in the most remote parts of ye world or amongst the most Barbarous Indians is to set up a Tavern or drinking house.'

Walduck sums up his views on the island in this vitriolic acrostic:—

'Barbados Isle inhabited by Slaves
And for one honest man ten thousand knaves
Religion to thee's a Romantick storey
Barbarity and ill gott wealth they glory

S. H. WOOLF

All Sodom's Sins are Centred in thy heart
Death is thy look and Death in every part
Oh! Glorious Isle in Vilany Excell
Sin to the Height—thy fate is Hell.'

But, however trenchantly he condemns the vice and sordid knavery by which he was surrounded, Walduck is far from being a prig. He himself lays no claim to superior virtue. 'I am amongst them and by exposing their follies show my own,' he admits candidly, 'and I wish I may not share in this guilt too.' To those who are interested in the early times of our West Indian colonies it is a matter of real regret that no more of these pungent and informative letters have been preserved.

WE KNOW NOT WHOM TO MOURN

EDGAR MITTELHÖLZER

IT was an afternoon of grey clouds like old rice bags, and the wind strong and loud in its moaning, so loud that on the back veranda where Harry, Hoolcharran's third son, sat in a bright-blue wicker chair the voices in the house could not be heard. The wind smelt of cow-dung and stagnant water and the iodine of the sea, for the savannah surrounded the house on all sides, and parts of the savannah were flooded from the rains of last week, and on the dry parts small island-cakes of cow-dung lay spotted: still, piteous islands amid the larger islands that moved, for these were the cows and sheep and the goats. Now and then the wind brought a lowing or a bleating, or the voice of a herdsman, for this was the hour when the animals were coming home to their pens, and it was the hour, too, when Hoolcharran, who owned them all and the house, was dying.

Only Harry, the third son, sat on the back veranda, long-headed, hands clasped in his lap, not smoking. Just watching the animals come home to pen, his eyes not sad but with a haunted calm, as though he were a man to whom death was not a thing for grief or fear but for thought. He seemed a lonely, brooding man.

In the sitting-room and dining-room—only a large archway separated the two rooms—were gathered Toolwa, an old aunt of Hoolcharran's wife, Dookie. And Tommy, the eldest son, who, at thirty-four, was one of the richest rice-millers on the Corentyne Coast, perhaps in the whole of British Guiana. And Gobin, the dispenser from Kildonan, who was sixty-seven, and an old friend of Hoolcharran. Hoolcharran and Gobin, as boys, had run in shirt-tails on the Public Road, and, naked, had caught *sherrigas* and *hassars* in the canals; had fought and quarrelled at school, and laughed and climbed mango trees.

Gobin, in his little drug-store in Kildonan, had made up all the medicine Hoolcharran and his family had ever used. Also in the sitting-room and dining-room sat Doris and John and Edward, Tommy's children; Doris was fifteen (she was at High School in New Amsterdam), and John thirteen and Edward eleven. John and Edward were quiet boys, and to-day the awe of death made them quieter. But Doris, who could never keep back her giggles, was giggling now at a joke about two goats that Bella had just told her. Bella was present, too; she was the black cook, and had worked for the Hoolcharrans from the age of nineteen; she was forty-two now, and no other cook, it was said, on the whole Corentyne Coast, could make a coconut curry like Bella. She was fond of telling jokes, especially smutty ones about Burroo Goat and Burroo Tiger.

Toolwa, the old aunt, gave Bella scolding glances, but did not try to scold her with words, because Bella was like a second mistress in the house. Bella's mother and Dookie (Mrs. Hoolcharran) had planted rice together as girls, and Dookie had always treated Bella as the daughter of her good friend rather than as a menial. Bella called Dookie Aunt Dookie, not ma'am. Hoolcharran's wealth had not turned Dookie's head, and Dookie, though she liked her big house and the car and all the things that money could buy, had never forgotten the old days of want. Bella had always been fat and plain—she had a cast in her right eye—and no man had ever asked her to marry him. Not that this made her any the less cheerful.

In this hour of death, Dookie was upstairs in the room with the dying man. She sat on a large old trunk near a window, Phyllis Rambarry with her. Phyllis was the fourth child and only daughter; she was the wife of Deane Rambarry, a barrister-at-law who practised in New Amsterdam: she was educated and dressed well.

The doctor—his name was Ribeiro—and the nurse—a short black girl called Turpin—stood by the bedside doing what they could to save Hoolcharran. The doctor was a tall, slim Portuguese of thirty-five or so, and he was supposed to be the best doctor in Berbice. He had told Dookie that he would do all he could, but that from what he could see the chances were slim. He spoke with a sneer, for he was that kind of man. He

did not like coloured people, especially East Indians. It was only because he was supposed to be the best doctor in Berbice that Dookie had sent for him when Hoolcharran got the stroke at around ten o'clock that morning. Only a few minutes before ten o'clock Hoolcharran had been laughing and talking in his jovial way, his fat paunch trembling, his silver hair glinting in a shaft of weak sunshine from the slightly overcast sky. Nobody in the big house, painted a bright yellow and blue, had guessed that death was so near Hoolcharran.

Doctor Ribeiro had ruled that no more than two members of the family could be allowed in the sick-room at a time. He wouldn't have a crowd, he had said—and had said it in a curt voice. Dookie had tried to persuade him to let her call in three more doctors, for she was so grieved and upset she felt that she must do everything she possibly could, with the aid of money, to save Hoolcharran. Doctor Ribeiro had given her a cold look, but, after an hour or so, he had agreed to have Doctor Bembridge from Skeldon, higher up the coast. Doctor Bembridge was an English doctor who had been practising for two or three years on the Corentyne Coast.

Maurice, the second son, was on his way from Georgetown, nearly a hundred miles off. Maurice had a big grocery shop in Georgetown. His wife was an invalid and could not travel. They had no children. Dookie was praying that Maurice would arrive before Hoolcharran died, because Maurice had been his father's pet son. Hoolcharran was not conscious, it was true, but, still, felt Dookie, his spirit might sense Maurice's presence if Maurice came in time. Dookie and Hoolcharran were Presbyterians. Hoolcharran never cared too much about the church, but Dookie was a staunch believer in Jesus Christ and the Christian faith as taught by the Presbyterians. She went to church every other Sunday, and whenever anyone in the house was sick, she always prayed for their recovery. Hoolcharran had often laughed at her and asked her if she forgot that her parents had been Hindus, but he was always very generous in his gifts of money to the church, and would sometimes even humour Dookie by going to church with her.

Jim Rambarry, Phyllis's husband, had gone off in the car to get Doctor Bembridge.

And now the wind moaned, and Harry, the third son, watched the twilight deepen.

Toolwa got up and crossed over to where Gobin sat in a rocking chair near the big cabinet radio set. She bent and whispered something. She asked him about the will. Did Gobin know if Hoolcharran had made a will? Her manner was furtive and scheming; she cast quick glances round at the others as though feeling that she was doing something wrong. Her grey-edged dark-brown eyes were shiny with greed. The wrinkles of her seventy-odd years looked like shadowed gutters of evil perhaps dug in the night by the jumbies strayed from the far-away *courida* bush. Toolwa lived in a lonely wooden cottage three miles away, and the wind and the rain, and perhaps the jumbies, were tearing it down shingle by shingle. Toolwa would have liked some money to build a big house, though if she had got the money she would not have built the house but would have put the money in the bank. She had over three thousand dollars in Barclays Bank, for she was thrifty and saved as much as she could out of the allowance Dookie made her. Her son, Palwan, had died at the age of nineteen, and it was said that, at that time, Toolwa had had a lot of money, for her husband had owned two rice fields, and had saved his money carefully in the mattress of his bed. But Toolwa had been so stingy and had denied Palwan good food for so long a time that he got tuberculosis.

Gobin shook his head and said he didn't know if Hoolcharran had made a will, but he supposed so. He looked a little impatient with her, and only because he was polite he checked himself from telling her to move away from him. Gobin was grieved. As soon as the news had reached him that his good friend had taken ill, he had shut his drug-store and taken bus and come.

The telephone began to ring. It was in the dining-room, a wall-'phone.

Doris sprang up and went and answered it. She said yes several times, then no, then told the person at the other end that yes, the doctor said there was little hope. Yes, grandma was upstairs in the room with him and the doctor . . .

Toolwa asked Gobin if he thought Hoolcharran would

leave anything for Harry. 'Harry disappoint 'e bad,' said Toolwa.

'Me can't tell you, Toolwa,' said Gobin, shaking his head patiently. 'Only 'e lawyer can tell you wha' 'e leff and wha' 'e ain' leff.'

Toolwa glanced round again, and then asked: 'Why 'e didn't tck Rambarry for 'e lawyer? Ent Rambarry 'e son-in-law?'

'Me can't tell you, Toolwa,' said Gobin, fidgeting and frowning now.

'It funny,' said Toolwa, 'Ah believe 'e didn't too like Rambarry for Phyllis. Ah hear 'e did want Phyllis marry white overseer.'

'Dat's a lie, Toolwa.'

'So me hear. Me only tell you wha' me hear, Gobin.'

Gobin made a puffing grunt of anger, and his lips moved soundlessly.

Toolwa tittered and moved off, went back to her chair by the upright piano.

And the wind moaned around the house, and Harry saw a weak light glowing in the distance where the gloom was dense. Harry smiled slightly, as though he could hear a voice in the wind that spoke only for him. Since he was a boy Harry had listened to the wind. No one knew what went on in his mind. He was not married. He was a school teacher and taught in the village school. He lived home here, and had many books, and when he came home went to his room. He sat some evenings alone on the back veranda, as he was sitting now. A strange, brooding man, Harry. As distant as the sea beyond the line of *courida* bush. Only the wind and the savannah knew him.

The drone of a car sounded. It was Rambarry, Phyllis's husband, coming back from Skeldon with Doctor Bembridge. The headlights could be seen by John from the door. John had gone to the front door to catch a lizard which had streaked past his chair into the gallery and out under the door. John had a special piece of wire with a noose at the end for catching lizards. He liked to see a lizard squirm in the noose by its neck, and sometimes he would hold it over a fire if he was near a fire. Edward, who did not like to see any creature suffer, often

scolded him for his cruelty, but John still went on catching lizards. Flies, too, and bees and pond-flies. One day in New Amsterdam, John had gone hunting with a Daisy air-gun, and had shot four kiskadees and three blue sackies. He was a deadly shot with an air-gun. One of the blue sackies fell from a telegraph wire only maimed in the wing, so John spread it out on the grass parapet and pinned it down with two stones. He brought out a box of matches and burnt every feather off it, and then stuck it with pins until it died.

The car bumped its way toward the house along the uneven grass and gravel track. And presently Rambarry came up the stairs with Doctor Bembridge, a thin, short, red-faced Englishman with a small brown moustache and a quick, nervous way of glancing this way and that way and smiling. He said 'Evening! Evening!' to everybody in the sitting-room and dining-room, as he passed on his way to the stairs that led to the upper storey. Tommy rose and said: 'Good night, doctor!' his manner respectful and awed. For Tommy, in spite of the education Hoolcharran had given him, was still, at heart; a shy and salaaming coolie. Tommy, though he was one of the richest rice-millers on the Corentyne Coast, had never learnt how to be self-assured. He was timid in his relations with people. Only in business he knew how to be shrewd and bold. He never made a false move in business. But people, especially white people, frightened him. As a boy, he had often watched the white overseers on their mules aback of the nearby sugar-estate and trembled. Overseers, he had heard, kicked and shouted. They kicked the coolies who cut canes, and shouted curses at them, and threatened to shoot. One day he had seen an overseer kick a thin old coolie who was in charge of the oxen pulling the cane-laden punts along the canal.

Rambarry accompanied the doctor upstairs. And Tommy sat down.

Bella was telling Doris a story about Bill, Burroo Rabbit, and Burroo Monkey. Doris giggled, and Edward asked her if she didn't know that Grandpa was ill upstairs.

Bella looked at him and said: 'Boy, death can only come once to everybody. Wha' you hurting you' head for? Let de girl laugh!'

'You're too callous,' said Edward.

Bella laughed softly and told him that it was what was inside your heart that mattered. 'Not what you' face show. Dis is a life, boy, we never know who to mourn over. Sometimes it's de people who alive who we should cry for—not de dead ones, or de ones we t'ink dying. Run off and play wid you' marbles, boy.' Her fat bulk shivered with fresh mirth, and Edward turned off and went sulkily toward the gallery.

And so the wind went on moaning round the house, and the clouds moved faster in the sky. Inky cloaks they looked like now, for night had come, and Toolwa was calling to Bijoolie to bring in the gas-lamps. Bijoolie was the man-of-all-work. He was an illegitimate son of Hoolcharran's, for Hoolcharran had been a gay young man. He had drunk his rum and had his women. The son of a cane-cutter, Hoolcharran had begun as a provision farmer, and lived in a mudhouse. All the land he possessed was an acre of swampy savannah. But he had mingled industry and thrift with his love for pleasure. The first cow he owned had strayed on to his land, and he could have had it impounded, but he saw a way of making it his own. It belonged to the widow of Poolram who lived a mile up the Public Road. Hoolcharran took the cow to Poolram's widow, and Beekwa—that was her name—was very grateful, and invited Hoolcharran to some curry and roti, as Hoolcharran knew she would have done. Beekwa was still young and pretty, and Hoolcharran was a handsome young man. Hoolcharran did not go home until the next morning. Six weeks later Beekwa made a present of the cow to Hoolcharran. The cow was with calf. Hoolcharran's career as a cattle-rancher had begun.

The moaning of the wind never stopped. It was still moaning past Harry's chair on the back veranda when (it was after nine o'clock) Phyllis brought the news from upstairs. Phyllis was breathless with excitement which she tried to suppress, for she moved with good-class coloured people in New Amsterdam, and had to be careful not to show any vulgar feelings. Phyllis told them that Hoolcharran would live. Yes, the doctor said he had tided over the worst. It had been touch and go, she said, but he would recover. He might be laid up for several

weeks, even months, but he would live. Oh, she was so glad—for Mother's sake. . . . A sigh of relief and joy went through the house, as though the wind had pushed a bright tributary out of its dark moaning in upon them.

But . . .

And then Edward's cry rose. Edward came in from the back veranda, pale and frightened-looking, and his cry rose. A cry of horror. Perhaps he was remembering, too, what Bella had told him an hour or two ago . . . 'Dis is a life, boy, we never know who to mourn over' . . . And they all went out on to the back veranda and looked at Harry who still sat in the bright-blue wicker chair. His head was slightly thrown back, and he was staring at the clouds in the wind. But his eyes were so steady. And beside his chair, on the floor, lay the bottle, not bright-blue like the wicker chair, but a dark blue, and with a red label bearing a skull and crossbones. A lonely, brooding man, Harry. About him was a smell of bitter almonds. About him the wind still moaned.

CHICKEN-LICKEN

BRYAN MacMAHON

As the town clock struck two in the morning, the old woman sat bolt upright in bed and lifted the cords of her tea-painted hair off her forehead. After stroking her pouched genteel face she shook the huddle of bedclothes beside her. 'Get up, Chicken-Licken,' she said, 'and pluck me some flowers.' 'Yes, mother,' came the reedy but muffled reply.

The ball of bedclothes disintegrated and revealed a legless misshapen girl who clambered down the bedpost and softly placed the stumps of her warm thighs on the cool floor. Her back was a broken string protruding from a sofa: her inadequate black hair looked as if it had been just greased with butter. Her elongated face was an odd arrangement of sharp blades and small planes: the lips were cyanosed and showed a reluctance to cover her teeth. Her features were already half-way to the death mask. Swinging about the floor on the long crutches of her arms Chicken-Licken made the type of object a greyhound instinctively pricks up his ears at.

'Light the candle, Chicken-Licken. Get me my sketch book and crayons.'

The enamel candlestick was bright blue in colour, and under the flame it made a daub of gaiety in the drab room. The peeling wallpaper had a design of depressing floral chains. The assortment of crayon—and charcoal—drawings on the walls added to the general air of dinginess and gloom. Smoke-soiled saucepans and delph littered the flag of the fireplace. A dismal wardrobe with a speckled mirror on its door, a few chairs and a large black trunk—these were the remaining features of the bedroom.

Taking a shabby brown coat from a bedpost, Chicken-Licken deftly shrugged herself into it. She twisted the end of her nightdress and tied it with a piece of cord that she had previously placed between her lips. From behind the trunk she took two handles that rather resembled the handles of a plasterer's float. Using these to protect her hands, she

swung quickly towards the door. But the mother, hearing the muted knock-knock of the handles on the floorcloth, looked up from her sketch book and said, 'You'll be heard, child.' So the girl wistfully turned and replaced the handles beside the trunk. As she again moved towards the door her sweat-wet hands squeaked on the linoleum.

Chicken-Licken carefully opened the door and peeped out. The normal odour of middle-class domesticity attacked her: the smells compounded of cooked cabbage, furniture polish and gas. While her eyes glittered at the white door knobs of the short corridor, her ears became tuned to sift the sounds of the house. She heard the drip-drip of a tap and the armoured clank of the ball-cock in the cistern of the water-closet. She heard a remote creak-crack, but that, she knew, was the sound of the deal kitchen table contracting in the cool of the night. She glanced backward over her shoulder into the bedroom. Her mother was still industriously turning over the leaves of the sketch book.

Down the corridor she moved with the wariness of a rat or a rabbit. Her trailing coat hissed softly behind her. She was doing her best to reduce to a minimum the noise of her palms. At the stairhead she paused and revolved softly to ensure that the house behind her was empty of enemy. Descending the stairs she gripped the bannisters low down, where the cream paint was comparatively unsullied. Once, when a large button of her coat struck timber smartly, she took minor fright and paused listening for possible repercussions. From the floor of the hall the horned hall-stand loomed terrifyingly above her: the top two horns held no coats and thus the whole had the appearance of a large aloof animal. She looked up at the greatcoats, raincoats and scarves and, under her gaze, the articles began to clothe their owners—giddy Eileen, Mr. Mac. of the Income Tax, Thomas the Insurance Agent, Mr. Hannigan, the mystery man. By the side of the hall-stand stood a heavy mahogany chair—this she pushed across the dark imitation parquetry towards the door, clambered up and turned the knob. She was careful to fasten the safety-catch of the lock lest the door should slam while she was outside.

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CHICKEN-LICKEN

The town was quiet, the pavements dry, and the sky abounding in wideawake stars. Chicken-Licken crouched on the threshold stone: she was listening to the remote violin-high whine of the night. Slowly her body cooled. The house was one of a row of two-storey red brick houses, each of which had a trim lawn or garden in front of it with a row of black breast-high iron railings between it and the street. In the centre of the lawn of Chicken-Licken's house stood a thick-set shrub: beneath the window of the front room ran a narrow tiled pathway edged with upright tiles having serrated edges.

Chicken-Licken drew the door to behind her. The flap of the letter-box was missing its spring, and the sound of its idling startled her. She scuttled along the pathway and began to rummage for flowers in the bristling unmown grass at the foot of the railing dividing the lawn from that of the adjacent house. She plucked five or six daisies: then she found a dandelion. She placed the *O* of the dandelion stem securely on her tongue and grimaced amusedly as the dandelion milk bit her. She began to spit sharply like a cat. Afterwards she hopped on to the lawn, plucked a grass stem and began to chew it. The smell of the grass excited her and immediately she began to skip hither and thither with movements that were grotesquely wanton.

Suddenly she paused, pivoted carefully on her stumps, and held her head high in an attitude of keen attention. The sound of drunken singing that by a trick of the night air had seemed to come from far away was now revealed to her perilously close at hand. She heard a man's voice grate upon the sleeping street. 'O, Lucky Jim,' it went harshly, 'how I envy him . . .'

Her first impulse was to hop into the hallway and close the door behind her. Then she paused for, inexplicably, she seemed resolved upon risk. Scuttled behind the bush, she drew her brown coat tightly about her. Now she could plainly hear the irresolute shuffle of the oncomer's shoes. Closer and closer to the bush she crouched until she appeared to have melted into it. A queer exhilaration began to take possession of her.

Low and statuesque—out of the corner of one eye she spied

the singer. A tubby middle-aged bare-headed man wearing dark-rimmed spectacles. In the intervals of singing he was muttering to himself. As he approached, Chicken-Licken's feeling of adventure became almost unbearable. Then, just abreast of the bush, the man halted. He grew curiously silent, neither singing nor muttering. His shoes began, to side-step awkwardly towards the railing: then the girl heard a loose rail rock under his grasp. She heard the stertorous breathing and she knew he was staring hard at the bush. Chicken-Licken felt her heart expand and her inadequate chest constrict. After a terrifying moment of silence she ventured to move her head slowly to the left. When his shoulder was visible to her she moved her head evenly to the right—to safety and concealment. His boots noised: she thought he was preparing to go away, but then she heard the whole railing groan beneath the full weight of his body. His voice came like an axe-blow. The surprising thing about the voice was its absolute sobriety.

'Hey! you behind the bush—I see you!'

Chicken-Licken remained immobile. Her stomach was coopered with terror. Her heart seemed to have gone up into her head. She tried hard not to retch emptily.

'D'you hear me?' Under threat of a scene the voice was blackmailing her into emerging.

Chicken-Licken emerged. She gave a few half-hearted swings towards the door. Then a novel quality in the man's voice made her stop.

'Wait!'

The girl waited. Chicken-Licken had one eye cocked over her shoulder.

'What's your name?'

Timidly came the small pipe of her voice: 'Elsie . . . Elsie Woodruffe.'

The tubby man gestured vaguely with his left hand. He laughed richly into the hollow town. He pointed inaccurately with a drunken forefinger.

'I have you now,' he said, 'you're Chicken-Licken!' He was laughing uproariously.

The girl was puzzled. She still held her crouch: the tips of her forefingers were ready to spring her to sanctuary.

CHICKEN-LICKEN

The man rested his forearms on the flange of the spearheads and eased the weight of his heavy body. He stared at the girl for a long while. Then, utterly without warning, his white palms grew unsure and even suppliant. He rustled his fingers as if he were calling a dog. Pleadingly he said: 'Come here, sweetheart, I'm lonesome.'

For a while Chicken-Licken did not move. Then slowly her head tilted and straightened, tilted and straightened. The coolness of womanhood sieved through her. There was a suggestion of coquetry in the way her eyelashes faltered and fell. But the suggestion was fleeting. Suspicion was again uppermost.

Now the man's voice was wholly mendicant and conveyed a feeling of utter isolation. 'I wouldn't hurt a hair on your head. You know me, Chicken-Licken. The stones of the road know Chubby O'Neill. There isn't a brick, crick, or stick around here that hasn't heard my wonderful joke. When I'm introduced to a person, I open my mouth wide and I say: "Look down my throat and tell me what you see." And the person says: "I see nothing—nothing at all." And I say: "Ha-ha-ha, that's damn funny because there's a thousand pounds in dry cash, a chemist's shop, and four town fields gone down there."'

Chicken-Licken was still fifty-fifty terror and coquetry.

When again he spoke, Chubby's voice was broken but not maudlin: 'For God's sake, sweetheart, come over to the bars.'

She was coming, coming slowly: each hop plainly stamped with bravery. She made a low mound beneath him. When he moved his head the lenses of his glasses were filled with the sky's light.

'There! There!' soothed Chubby. 'Something I must tell you. My two shoes are drunker than a drunken owl but, by golly, my tongue is stone cold sober. What I want to tell you is this. I'm a rehearser. I rehearse everything before it happens: murder cases, picnics and confraternity excursions. I've rehearsed meeting you. That's true. There are several first class phrases inside in me that will cut the bowels out of me if I let them go to waste. That's why you've got to listen . . . do you understand? Let me think . . . I have it! First, there is a curious chemistry in the juxtaposition of

rudderless and rudderless. The metaphor is lousy but it will serve.'

Then, commandingly, Chubby said: 'Look up at me, Chicken-Licken, I want to tell you some more. Why *you*? Because, my princess, you and I are beyond umbrage. I've just thought of another sentence I've rehearsed. It's this: I find your broken back a powerful argument in favour of a compensatory eternity.' Chubby then made a vulgar noise with his lips. 'They may have buried your pegs, little woman, but the valuable part of you would appear to be beyond assault. Ho-ho-ho . . . at their residence, 44 Cloncurry Street, Left Peg and Right Peg, dearly beloved limbs of Chicken-Licken . . .' Again his laughter filled the town.

Chicken-Licken continued to look up at him, as if there never had been a time when she had not known him.

'What age are you—fifteen or fifty?' he asked.

'Seventeen.'

'That's the explanation! Every woman is beautiful at seventeen. She can't help it.' Again the laughter, this time with a hint of tartness to it. 'Come to consider it, I'm beautiful myself. A type of inverted beauty—the beauty of what I might have been. The beauty of that inch or ell by which I have failed to leap the chasm. My mother, God rest her, had me educated. And to what purpose? That I might spit Latin spittle into an Irish spittoon. Aquilifer fortissimus erat. My mother had a curly head and when she laughed her whole head danced. She had me taught music. I can still differentiate a crotchet from a quaver.' Chubby began to sing: 'Figaro, Figaro' in an astonishing falsetto. Then he gripped the bars and began to rattle them as if he were venting anguish.

'Come closer, Chicken-Licken. I won't hurt you. I have nothing whatsoever to offer you, nothing except the gim . . . gimcrack necklace of my conversation. Come closer, sweetheart. It's . . . It's just the wide desert of terror confronting me. Come closer! What shall I speak about? Rummy, bluebirds or Mark Antony?' His voice had climbed: it was imperative and exigent. The girl came closer. Then the voice became confidential. 'I once read in a book of a beautiful lady—it

was a coverless book: I found it in my aunt's lavatory. This beautiful lady's name was Julia Brink. I shall love you for ever, Julia—Julia Brink. In the narrows of the autumn nights I wake and cry: "Julia! Julia Brink!" In the lime-green obscenity that is spring I watch the chestnut tree farrowing on the fringe of the wood and I cry: "Julia! Julia Brink!" When the low brown blaze is on October's floodwater I cry: "Julia! Julia Brink!"

Chubby paused. 'Give me your hand, Chicken-Licken.'

The girl gave him her hand, slowly but trustfully.

'I wish . . . what do I wish? I wish I owned a woman whose bright resilient spirit I could bounce up to the blue stars. I wish . . . what the hell does it matter what I wish?' Endearingly: 'Do I frighten you, Chicken-Licken? Elsie, sweetheart, come closer . . . let me stroke your hair.' Chubby crouched and thrust his head through the bars.

He was stroking her hair when the two Guards turned the corner and came heavily down the pavement on the other side of the street. The girl disengaged her hand and scuttled behind the bush. Seeing the still crouched figure, one of the Guards sang out: 'You all right, Chubby?'

Chubby had gone surly. 'I'm all right, brother. Pass along.' The Guards walked away, one of them chuckling at something the other had said.

Chubby was still crouched. He was filled with a sense of bitter grievance. 'Governments!' he said, 'I spit on them! Public instruments for the dissection of private magic.' Then, as he straightened his back, 'A committee of bloody duffers with southpaw minds.'

As his drunken boots began to slither away he resumed his raucous singing: 'O Lucky Jim, how I envy him . . .'

When she realized that he had irrevocably gone, Chicken-Licken emerged from behind the bush and began to leap about. The bars strengthened the resemblance she bore to an animal in a cage. The unusual lengthening of her neck gave some indication of her bereftness. Then as the life leaked out of her, she collected her crushed flowers and went indoors.

Her mother was patience itself. 'What kept you, child?' she asked, with a deep sigh.

Chicken-Licken closed the bedroom door, then turned vividly. 'I was speaking to a man, mother . . . a lovely man.'

Her mother smiled indulgently and 'reminiscently. 'At seventeen,' she said, 'every girl comes to her mother and says: "I was speaking to a lovely man." Since the beginning of the world, child. Ah, well! Come into bed, Chicken-Licken. Be careful of the candlestick. That's right! Hold the flowers higher, child. let the light fall on them and on the sketch book as well.' The gnarled fingers began to operate the pencil: carelessly but accurately a flower took shape on the paper. 'Your father was a lovely man, too. Funny, I can't remember his face—only his lips pursing and smiling and loving. Ah, well! When I was an art teacher in Glasgow . . .'

Suddenly the night was spoiled by the racket of a motor cycle. The noise increased in brutality as the machine came down the street. Soon its venomous din filled the room. Chicken-Licken crouched low beside the blue candlestick. Her mother ceased drawing, raised the cords of her tea-painted hair, and listened with equanimity. The noise spurted out into silence.

The old woman drew a deep sigh. 'Only for the motor cycle, child, I should have been married to your father. There was a time and when I heard that noise I kept saying fiercely: "God's curse on all the motor cycles in the world." But somehow across the years my cursing lost its vehemence. Now . . . I just listen. Ah, well, we're not so badly off at all. The story could be worse. And to-morrow, remember, Mrs. Ansbrough has promised us stewed gooseberries. Hold the light higher, child. Let it fall on the sketch book. . . . Why, Chicken-Licken, whatever is the matter? Your eyes are bright and your hands are trembling.'

POETRY

THREE POEMS

by MARGIAD EVANS

REQUIEM I

Die? Yes, I!
But what a mourning galaxy!
Earth's family
and Cousins in the light beside
me in the glistening avenues will ride.

Farewell green life
farewell. Yet do not, eyes,
the lustre of the world with sadness dim.
What statelier fate
could immortality create
Or Prayer provide

than to be buried in your native star
with all of pompous space as sepulchre?

REQUIEM II

To go with song to funeral!
Happiness
is wordiness:
but joy is silent as the soul
and goes with stars to burial.

REQUIEM III

'When Voice no more can speak for me
and all my words are dead,
think that like day upon your face
my love is spread.'

POETRY

The last look she released, on earth,
still lives among the light
but with the sun is travelling
towards the night.

The breath that made each thought distinct
is now a thing bequeathed
like dew and essences of fields
the breezes breathed.

No part that is not Nature still!
But natural for so short a time
until winds close, and skies begin
their lofty lantern climb.

THE HARDEST FREEDOM

By SYDNEY TREMAYNE

When fear ripped out the reason of the days
Hideous laughter shook the burning cities.
Short shrift to the dead-cart then. Ho, bundle them in,
The treasures of civilization, works of men.
The baffled ape with the wrenched bar in its hands,
Inheritor of the altars, beat them down
And whimpered in the silence, trapped, alone.

In smashed and scattered streets of red desire
I have seen the fires go out, after the glare
The cold hours settle darkly. Stepping from fear's
Exhilaration down the broken stairs,
I have stood below despair and mourned for fires
Damped down, the will's wild action over.
Shall fear still suck the substance of the days,
Its web before the eyes, a wingless shell
Hung close and great as gallows across the sun ?

POETRY

I fear this cell in which the century weaves
Its jaded tapestry of grievous dooms.
Time cannot be this shuttling bad or good,
These scuttling incidents of thread and shears,
But huge as need it is, all being burning,
Ourselves consumed in darkness with the stars.

What hope is relevant, or what despair ?
Torment of light we are, a jangled pool,
Might cradle the world's clear image could we still
The beating of the black precipitous wings.
Why should we be so pitiably afraid ?
Has not our human gentleness survived
Where violence blows in ashes ? Oh in the rush
Of the flame, when it gushed from the ground's gashed side,
Green was the gathering flood that welled from the world's
wound :
Crushed by the whirlwind, kissed by the keen scythe's blade,
Our fields repeat their fruit, a compassionate harvest.

Day comes again, a grey light, a soft rain,
A fingering light that touches slate and stone.
Another day that opens into time
Grows in its comprehension of the city,
And I, blind as a clock, hear only words
Tick in the lurking stillness like a bomb.

Love is the hardest freedom, said the magician.
Observe this wrinkled nut. I break the shell.
It bleeds: it is my blood. I am that husk
But not the golden light that now lies free
And grows and spreading from the ground on wings
Turns back and settles and becomes a tree,
A tree of phoenix feathers and dark fruit
Soft with the lustre of a tropic night.
The tree of knowledge had a poisoned touch ;
This is the tree of wisdom. See, its fruit
Drops to the dusty earth and where it falls
More trees, plumed golden fountains, branch and soar
Till all the world is filled with dancing light.

POETRY

He bowed and passed a hand across his eyes
And vanished as a taper flickers out.

No, love is not known this way. For us the dark,
The impossible acceptance, rich years spilled,
The lean years withering without a sign,
A blind man in the sun whose hands unclasp,
Falling as if to let the world go free,
And heart that holds the world, remembering day.
After the hemlock cup, the face upturned
Towards the light's perfection is our love.

If we could understand how soon we lose
The light and all our secret hoard of days,
How futile fear, hope how inconsequent
To bear sun's fire made flesh, burning to dust,
The light made dust to recreate the light.
When there is finally nothing to receive,
Oh then shall we comprehend this human grace?

MARIMARUSA

by J. F. HENDRY

'What you are now you will always be,'
Birds and crowds began to cry
Peering and waving as if forever
Handkerchiefs winged with sorcery,
'Until the present is understood,
Returning will not help you find
Us here as we are now, and leaving
May break the binding thread forever.
Was there really anything to do
That could not have been done at home?
Was there really anything to find
You could not have found at home?'

POETRY

The gangways spun like wheels on the quay.
The lobsters retreated and castaway ropes
Hissed like snakes in the sea.
The sun rose. Time burned through the scene
Where morning lay among fish in a net
Christening with scales a yawl
Swiftest on any loch which we
Once carried home still wet
With sails of brine, and grass-green
Weed wound round her bows like dye,
After a voyage through limpet caves
Under the pierhead hall.

We had been advised to become
And we became.
The world of time was the world of becoming.
Nothing could ever be the same.
We envied the pilot in his cutter
Who could return so soon
Our boyhood went ashore with him
To the room the height of the moon
Between Gourrock and Greenock
Where a cripple that afternoon
Kept the tide at bay
As he watched the clock.

A lighthouse flickered from a green green rock
Messages of comfort and goodwill
Flags fluttered from mast and harbour
As we stood out, until
It was impossible to answer them all
And we turned to face the chill
Vastness of the sea, to which
We were committed still—
The scene with the expanding frame
For good or ill
Avoiding transformation
Of the will.

POETRY

Only then did we realize
The meaning of departure,
The enormity of the enterprise
On which we had embarked.
Only then did we realize
The loss of separation
In which we had incarcerated
Those we loved so well—
Sea was time where horns blared.
And sirens drummed farewell
As distance, plunging in engines,
Encircled us all in a cell.

NORTHERN IDIOM

DENIS BOTTERILL

UNDER THE EILDON TREE. SYDNEY GOODSIR SMITH.
Serif Books, Edinburgh.

SELECTED POEMS. ALEXANDER GRAY. MacLellan. 6s.

THE WHITE THRESHOLD. Poems by W. S. GRAHAM.
Faber. 8s. 6d.

HURLYGUSH. Poems by MAURICE LINDSAY. Serif Books.
7s. 6d.

A KIST OF WHISTLES. New Poems by HUGH MAC-
DIARMID. MacLellan. 6s.

'SYDNEY SLUGABED GODLESS SMITH' upon whom 'Auld Oblomov has nocht on', has written in *Under the Eildon Tree* a poem in Twenty-four Elegies in praise of his Love. Whether the lady concerned (whom he 'Got in the Black Bull o' Norroway') were

'. . . Deirdre, Ariadne, Calliope,
Gaby, Jacquette, Katerina, Sandra . . .
A wee bit piece
O' what our faithers maist unaptlie
But romanticallic designatit "Fluff"'

or whether she were really the

'Rum and draucht Bass.

—*Sheer hara-kiri*'

with which Mr. Smith seeks to flog his memory, his nostalgic unhappiness, his awkward slummocking Pegasus, would be difficult to answer. The very gusto, the good-humoured cynicism, the sentimental display of some classical learning, and the sudden seriousness, give his elegies the qualities of drunkenness. They are exhilarating, unexpected; they race, dawdle, trip, stagger and come to sudden and often laughable conclusions, and the red light of his 'Sandra the cou o the auld Black Bull' dances a furious jig from one end of the line to the other.

And implicit in all this invigorating Scots bawdy is pure beauty—simple and startling—as in *New Hyne* (Harbour):

DENIS BOTTERILL

'I had a luve walked by the sea,
The waterfront at eenin,
Sol was a gowden pennie at our side
A bare league awa.
A wee boat wi a broun sail
Left the pier juist at our feet
And sailed awa intil the sunset
Silentlie, the water like a keekin-glass'

and in:

'I heard a lassie at the winnock sing
And aa her sang was o her luve.'

But even at his simplest and least showy the contrast with Alexander Gray is surprising, and we seem to travel backwards into an earlier age. These *Selected Poems* are not so exciting as Goodsir Smith's, but Sir Alexander Gray can turn a rhyme neatly in both Scots and English and give polish to the trivial and add a touch of kindlier, less rumbustious humour:

On a Cat, Ageing.

'He blinks upon the hearth-rug,
And yawns in deep content,
Accepting all the comforts
That Providence has sent.

Louder he purrs and louder,
In one glad hymn of praise
For all the night's adventures,
For quiet and restful days.

Life will go on for ever,
With all that cat can wish;
Warmth and glad procession
Of fish and milk and fish.

Only—the thought disturbs him—
He's noticed once or twice,
The times are somehow breeding
A nimbler race of mice.

And in translating Heine into the Scots vernacular he has achieved a rare beauty I cannot remember to have seen

NORTHERN IDIOM

matched in English. This is what he makes of *Ich stand in dunkeln Traumen*:

'I glowered upon her picture;
Auld dreams cam back ance mair;
I thocht life cam rekindlin'
Her face as I stude there.

A bonny smile cam playin'
Aboot her rosy mou';
Her een shone through her greetun'
Like violets weet wi' dew.

My hert cam near to brakin';
I cudna stop my tears.
Ach lass, and hae I tint you
Through a' the weary years?'

An unpretentious poet from whom there is much quiet pleasure to be got. But O how sober after a page or two of Slugabed! Incidentally, both poets provide a Glossary, or—as Goodsir Smith calls it—a 'Word Leet for Eskimos, Cherokees, Uzbeks, Sassunachs, and ither outlands.'

The reputation of W. S. Graham has steadily advanced and it is pleasant to find his new book tricked out in Faber's familiar cloth and fashion. The language is English, but the idiom and construction are alien to Southern ears. There are moments when it seems he has caught an echo of Dylan Thomas:

'There with his step take step along the nightway
Chained into white under the snowfalling owl
And spoken bell. He's taken by a dead hand
Across the black hillside, that inheritance
Which utters thousands on his lips and keeps
The illforgiving terrors of all the dead.'

But I know of no other poet writing like this:

'Since there (spun into sudden place to discover)
We first lay down in the nightly body of the year,
Fast wakened up new midnights from our bed,
Moved off to other sweet opposites, I've bled
My look along your heart, my thorns about your head.'

Or this:

‘Listen. Put on morning.
Waken into falling light.
A man’s imagining
Suddenly may inherit
The handclapping centuries
Of his one minute on earth.’

It is not easy to attune oneself to him, but he repays the necessary trouble of each re-reading, and if he seem to be preoccupied with Death it is no sentimental dirging, but a vigorous awareness of the transfiguration death accomplishes. The *Three Poems on Drowning* are remarkable examples of the strength he can pack and control:

‘... bubbled seabelled sky and the rushing shoulders
With screaming bundles of foam over their home fathoms
Lock them shaped under out of their smiling lifestories.’

With Maurice Lindsay’s *Hurlygush*—noise made by running water—we are back in the Scots, and besides being graced with illustrations by Susan Yorke the book has an Introduction by Hugh MacDiarmid. These are the closing sentences:

‘He has set his hand to the plough and will not turn back. Speed the plough! The ground has been long fallow, it will yield a great harvest—of which these lyrics are a splendid earnest.’

Quite. I can only hope that Mr. Lindsay in his ploughing leaves no stone unturned, no furrow unexplored, and avoids the cliché like the plague.

In his Notes printed at the end of the book Mr. Lindsay gives reasons for writing in Scots whilst thinking and speaking in English—and very sound reasons they are. But it seems to me one does not revive a dying language by writing in it and that it would be better to graft some of the lovely Scots words and phrases into the Southern tongue which is more generally in use. To which Mr. Lindsay and his fellows of the Scottish

NORTHERN IDIOM

Renaissance can retort that we should not only lose Slugabed Smith (God forbid!) but Henryson, Dunbar and some of Mr. Lindsay's own *Nicht Music*:

'For I hae luve wi'in me that 'ud mak
the hettest flames o Dante's lowean Hell
flouer reid whorls o passion, an syne crack
in blads, wi ilk yin burnan up itsel.

My luve's lik Schiller's million-huggan kiss . . .'

I would have liked to finish with a welcome free from dubeity to Mr. Hugh MacDiarmid who has done so much to encourage and help the younger men to fight for their very real renaissance, but when he writes in *Kulturkampf*:

'All this in passionate oratory—with such a commingling
Of resistance and surrender until, as in Mahler's Symphony No. 2,
in C Minor,
The very quakes and belchings of the earth seemed implicated in his
assertions,
Though here, as in Mahler, there were lovely lulls in the symphonic
struggle
—Like the dawn of "primaeval light" so pleadingly heralded
By the contralto in the fourth movement'

—I think I have the right to express a preference for Corno di Bassetto. And when, in *Hostings of Heroes* I get:

' . . . What have we to-day?
Dingy parades of vermin!
Details of the English army
In clothes the colour of excrement;
Or processions like that in Edinburgh
In honour of Sir Walter Scott's centenary,
A funeral trickle of Baillies and Lawyers,
Members of the Leith Water Board,
And, sole representative of the Republic of Letters,
Hugh Walpole!

God! What a crawl of cockroaches!

DENIS BOTTERILL

—I contend that I am offered neither poetry nor verse, and if satiric prose is intended its clumsiness makes it no more than mildly amusing.

Fortunately Mr. MacDiarmid has built a splendid reputation on better stuff than *A Kist of Whistles* and I prefer to remember him by it.

CINEMA

PASSPORT TO PIMLICO. HENRY CORNELIUS. Haymarket Gaumont, London.

THE LAST DAYS OF DOLWYN. EMLYN WILLIAMS. Rialto, London.

THE WINDOW. TED TETZLAFF. Academy, London.

KNOCK ON ANY DOOR. HUMPHREY BOGART. Astor, Broadway, New York.

By a coincidence not entirely without significance, each of the two best recent British films centres round a return to the past. One is a highly hilarious joke, the other a respectably moving drama. The fun in Pimlico starts when some boys, playing, inadvertently cause a hidden bomb to go off. The explosion reveals buried treasure and a scroll declaring that that part of Pimlico had been given, in perpetuity, to the Duke of Burgundy and his heirs. The inhabitants are not slow to realize that this makes them Burgundians and as such outside British law. They are, indeed, rather too quick to realize this, I thought, but it is unfair to cavil, for the fastness of the fun is partly what makes it so furious. Ration-books are immediately torn up, licensing hours ignored, and all the red-tape of our official-ridden form-filled lives merrily set at naught. Tourists from all over London come to this demi-paradise, this one street in the midst of the capital where the war is really over. Unfortunately spivs and black-marketeers come also. The Pimlicans, finding their trade about to be ruined, elect a representative council. Whitehall wakes up to the fact that there is a separate State in London; barriers are set up, a frontier is made. Pimlico retaliates by insisting on Customs at the local Underground; it is a nice moment when a travelling conjuror has to open the suitcase in which his performing pigeons are carried and there is a 'foreigner' whose eager desire for a visa can only be satisfied by a rubber-stamp receipt from the grocer. Food runs short. The children are evacuated—and return with food from the Zoo. Their example is followed by other boroughs of London, who start Bundles for Burgundy. A pig is dropped by helicopter.

Whitehall loses its head, and cuts off the water. The local policeman, no longer a member of the Metropolitan force but a Burgundian, sets forth by night to cross the frontier and turn it on. He is almost deflected by a drunk, alcoholically anxious to be arrested; and so it goes on, until Whitehall meets the people of Pimlico half-way, and they, having proved that 'it's because we're British that we insist on our right to be Burgundian if we want to', lend the Government their treasure on condition they live on the interest. Their right to the treasure involves the presence as a lodger of an heir to the Burgundy estate, but this is hardly noticed in the satire so amiably started and most satisfactorily carried through by Margaret Rutherford, Stanley Holloway, Hermione Baddeley and many others. The editing leaves much to be desired; the Pimlico scene is rather piecemeal and I for one never had any sense of the street as a street, it remained a series of unrelated shop 'sets', but against this it must be said that the dialogue is genuinely and continually witty, and that in London, at any rate, this gay burlesque of our present worries set in the ruins of our past dangers is joyously received. Since it could have been made by no other race, I presume it may explain Londoners quite well to other nations; but I can imagine certain parts of this country in which it would not be fully understood. I would add, as it is necessary to do to-day, that though it laughs, it is neither flippant nor cynical, and indeed a great deal of its success is due to its underlying warmth.

Mr. Emlyn Williams's film concerns a Welsh village, but here too, I found, I received no sense of the village as a whole, nor did frequent shots of people banging carpets, leaning out of windows, singing in fields or walking round corners give me any sense of village life. The success here was due to the acting of Edith Evans as a chapel-careaker, to Richard Burton as her adopted son, and to the lovely speaking with which the film is sprinkled. The inhabitants are about to be moved to a suburb of Liverpool, in order that their village may be flooded to provide a huge reservoir. Dame Edith, packing up to depart, finds an old document by which her cottage was bequeathed to her and her heirs in perpetuity. The flooding

is therefore held up and we prepare ourselves for a conflict of will, of old against new and of right, which is here also old, versus wrong. But at this point another person becomes important; the character played by Mr. Williams, who, as author of the script, has elected that a man, discovered robbing an offertory box when a boy in the village, should nurse his grievance and use his later successful position to bring about its destruction by a quite unnecessary scheme for a dam. This seemed to me a little too easy, and a good deal too flimsy a grasp of even the simplest principles of that psychology which I presume was meant to be taking a hand. Held up in his flooding-finale, Mr. Williams tries to set fire to the village, but is caught by Richard Burton and in the ensuing fight, perishes in his own flames. They are only small ones, so Dame Edith drags the body into her cottage, and then, to hide the crime, repairs to the dam and lets loose the water. It seemed to me an extravagant way of hiding one body—to destroy the homes of hundreds. Simpler, I should have thought, to have thrown the corpse in the dam. There might then have been no flooding, with population massed on the hillside, but it would have been a better film. As it is, it shirks the problems which a picture of Welsh village life in the early decade of this century could not but raise and remains a using of film for theatrical effects by mainly theatrical means. Its merits, and a great one, is the haunting beauty of Dame Edith's performance, which perhaps it is wrong to say is strangely not theatrical, and the rare sense of relationship which Richard Burton is able to give to his playing of an adopted son.

In *The Window*, on a hot night, a small boy sleeping on the fire-escape of a New York tenement, sees a murder committed. It seemed to me that if he were sleeping thus, other small boys would be doing the same; the film implied it was an accepted event in his family and if any family were Mr. and Mrs. Everyman, it is his. It seemed to me windows, generally, would be open and people restless and therefore that it was unlikely for the murderers, a man and a woman, to drag their corpse up the fire-escape and along roofs in a light bright enough to be filmed by. I offer no suggestion of what else

they could do with their corpse; I simply state that at this point my attention was not held. There was also the matter of a pillow, which the boy left on the fire-escape and on which the male murderer trod. No more was made of it, and I wondered why its white had been made to engage my eye.

The boy is a nine-year-old son of parents from whose stupidity he seeks relief in fantasy. He is always exaggerating events, telling wild stories and when he reports having seen a murder, he is told he has merely had a nightmare and that, had there been a murder, the police would have known. Shut in his room, he decides to tell the police. So again down the fire-escape and off to the station. Again he is disbelieved. He is taken back, and made to apologize to those it is thought he is slandering.

He is now terrified of being left alone. But his father works on night-shift and his mother has to look after a sick uncle. She refuses to take him with her, and his father, determined he shan't break out, screws up the window. As the boy fears, once he is left alone the couple break in. The film then follows the unfailling chase-formula—a frightening chase, over roof-tops, into derelict buildings, up and down rickety stairs, the two adults after one boy who just as he is cornered stumbles on the corpse which vindicates his story. This gives him strength to defy his pursuer from a breaking beam, which supports him but not the man, who falls to his death. The police, having by this time arrived, hold out a net into which he jumps and is restored to his parents in the one shot which is a concession to banality. His parents promise to believe him; he becomes a little hero, while both the woman and her victim are left in the building, and the whole business of stabbing with scissors is, presumably, left for another day; as is, indeed, much else to do with a civilization and society whose one way of getting air on hot nights is to sleep on fire-escapes. But a straight, if at times sadistic, picture, and sincerely acted by Bobby Driscoll as the boy, Barbara Hale and Arthur Kennedy as his dangerously dumb parents, and Ruth Roman as a startlingly unvarnished villainess; the hardness of Paul Stewart's male murderer seemed to me a little too bad to be good.

THE CINEMA

The Bogart film also traces the effect of family life upon the young—this time of a lad who takes to crime. His story unfolds as a series of flashbacks in the defence put up for him by Humphrey Bogart, as his lawyer. Special pleading of a high, or rather very low, order this seemed to me, doing its utmost to make the young man sympathetic, and its effect was in any event weakened by the fact that the actor, being a new star, was so photographic, that he would clearly have at once been snapped up as a model or even as a film-star. The main interest of the film was to see Humphrey Bogart openly playing stooge, for the technique described will be seen to reduce to the minimum the calls made on his acting ability and in this compares interestingly with the more usual build-up, as in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, in which most of the action is carried by others, Bogart being cut in with glowers, snarls, or an occasional mean action, all timed to give an illusion of what is wrongly called strength, whilst close-up and footage see to it who is kept most to the fore.

ROBERT HERRING

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

FOURTEEN YEARS. NETTIE PALMER. With woodcuts by
VERDON MARCOM. Meanjin Press (Melbourne). 2 gns.

LOUIS ESSON AND THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE.
VANCE PALMER. Meanjin Press. 21s.

TOMORROW AND TOMORROW. M. BARNARD ELDER-
SHAW. Phoenix House (Melbourne). 12s. 6d.

AS IRON HILLS. FLEXMORE HUDSON. Robertson and
Mullens (Melbourne). 8s. 6d.

WORDS AND MUSIC. ALAN MOYLE. Hawthorn Press
(Melbourne).

THESE books show how admirably book-production has moved ahead during the last ten years in Australia. *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* is a long novel, as good in printing and binding as any novels done in England to-day. This may seem a simple point to emphasize; but in fact it is of the highest importance. The lack of an effective mechanism for producing novels has held back Australian literature to an incalculable extent over the last generation or so, has driven writers abroad, and has prevented any steady exploitation of such gains as have been made.

The contents of the books reinforce the moral of their exterior. Nettie and Vance Palmer sum up a whole period of Australian letters, that between the ending of the old folk-national school and the new-start on broader lines which has developed in the last few years. In this period which they describe, the writer feels the need for a more comprehensive basis than that which satisfied his predecessors; he is aware simultaneously of world-currents and of the need to re-discover the Australian earth and its people. The two aspects come together, pull apart, promise new fertilisations, fall away again. The writer goes to England, to Europe, in search of new clues. Uneasily he slides from world to world, almost absorbed into the English scene but always drawing back at the last moment. He returns home with certain gains, but never quite what he thought and hoped. He grows disheartened and feels that things are in a mess; yet if he plugs

away, he finds new strengths, though often not those he sought. He comes back from unexpected angles on to the home-scene. The smudged pane is rubbed clear, and he sees the Australian pattern with a new fullness: if not a completely-realised and organic form, at least the 'red outline of beginning Adam'.

Out of the welter of strain and uncertainty, from time to time solid ground appears. In fact, in the midst of apparent failure, the Australian novel in its matured form comes into being, in the work of the self-exiled Henry Handel Richardson, and in that of writers who, despite temptations, go home in the last resort: Vance Palmer, Christina Stead, Katharine Pritchard.

The present brace of books by the Palmers appear opportunely, at a moment when the transitional phase ends. Now the gains can be properly assessed and a new national literature can expand with assurance, having learned much in Europe, but not too much. This cultural development coincides with the economic turn which has swung Australia from a pastoral and agricultural country into an industrialised one. The economic capacity to print novels in Australia for the native market is an aspect of the total forward movement.

Nettie Palmer's finely-produced book consists of extracts from her intermittent journal, 1925 to 1939. From her seemingly haphazard entries, made in England, France, Spain, as well as various parts of Australia, a full picture of her literary generation appears. Restlessness, a desire for new roots, a thirst to drink at the central springs of the spirit, an unsentimental nostalgia for the home-earth: we see here the Australian version of the exiles and lost generation of the United States in the same period. A version that lacks violence, bitterness, the sense of the void, the break-through of the forbidden depths. The Australian refuses to let go; thereby loses something, but gains something at the same time. The bridges aren't burnt, so there is no tragic situation; but there is a secure, though not easy, return to the homeland.

The complex oscillations of a divided impulse, which yet comes to rest on a resolving love of native earth, can be read in these fresh pages. The English reader will find pictures of figures he knows well, Dr. Leavis or Mulk Raj Anand, and

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

familiar moments of history, the pang and aspiration of the days of the Spanish Civil War; but these European elements are seen with a different slant, revalued against the Australian background. What emerges at the end is a fuller realisation of that background.

Vance Palmer does much the same job as his wife. But where she sets forth her personal tale, he keeps himself almost out of sight and tells about his friend Esson, a sensitive poet, who struggled for years to found an Australian theatre. Here the motive which reposes amid the convolutions of Nettie Palmer's record comes out into the open; we see Esson consciously seeking in Europe, and especially in the Ireland of the Abbey Theatre, for the clue that transforms a folk-culture into art-forms without loss of warmth and the close sense of people. Esson failed and went down in bad health, and yet his story becomes the story of an obstructed national culture in which indomitable forces of love and truth rise up and determine the future.

My only criticism is that Vance Palmer might well have added a chapter explaining the situation of the theatre in Australia during the period in question—the way in which the old national melodrama had faded out and nothing throve except some large commercial circuits importing mediocre English shows, mainly musicals. He might then have gone on to show how the recent advent of a strong amateur movement carries on the work that Esson so devotedly strove to accomplish.

The two women who write under the name of Eldershaw (and who will be found vividly described in *Fourteen Years*) have done much, since they wrote *A House is Built* (1929), to found the serious Australian novel. Their latest tale is for the most part an ambitious attempt to describe the frustrations of a group of ordinary Sydney people between the wars. That section of the novel is done with mastery and a remarkable palpability of effect: the texture of the hopeless hopeful lives is rendered so that one feels it rough under the thumb, dusty, musty, and yet stirring with inexplicable vortices of strength. But the authors evidently felt that they had defined the heavy routine of common life so well, had so powerfully

caught the sense of society as a snare pressing in all round their people, that they must let in some fresh air and gain an enlarged perspective' by the device of tale-within-tale. Their novel appears as the novel written by a man some four hundred years ahead.

Here they show their weakness. Their capacities as philosophic thinkers is not up to the level of their capacities as novelists evoking the immediacies of daily life. I cannot swallow either their picture of future society or their account of the breakdown of our present world. Prophetic or utopian fictions have played an important part in culture, and no doubt could be used effectively at our present juncture by writers who had a deep enough sense of the formative process at work. The utopian dream, with its climax in Morris, is clearly all too simple at this moment, however we may be able to return with enjoyment and invigoration to its great expressions in the past. At the same time the opposite type of work, that which abstracts the elements making for destruction, is certainly less humanly valuable and is scarcely more artistically valid. Jack London's *Iron Heel* said pretty well all that can be said along these lines, and remains incomparably superior to the various post-atom-bomb fantasies of hell, such as Aldous Huxley's; for London had a genuine political understanding of the forces of evil and Huxley has only a sense of perverted sexual energies which he fascinatedly fears and which he dramatises in revengeful daydream as the forces of history.

The Eldershaw-pair have neither London's political insight nor Huxley's suffering daydream. Their book therefore fails to achieve success as a work of art; the perspective-device does not give perspective. Still, they have written a deeply serious work, and their craftsmanship has a ripeness, a precision, a sureness of touch, which makes this book with all its weaknesses something of a landmark in Australian prose.

The two books of verse represent in simple terms the struggle I have sketched above between the two pulls. *Words and Music* is a sort of Australian Georgian-Verse, with well-trimmed suburban sensibilities. *As Iron Hills* is desperately Australian, sometimes mistaking declamatory programme

for achievement, but continually breaking through into new intensities of contact with Australian reality, till the dry bones of a hill-creek or the screech of sunset-parrots, the ants digging deep from the harsh sun beside the shabby mallee-scrub or the bronze line of hills, any odd detail is felt with a sharp pang of exulting love. Lost and found, lost again, like a crumb of earth rolled between the fingers. A glitter of dew, gone in the breath of the sun: and the open plain remains to be crossed. But in the flashes the rediscovery of Australia is pledged, is made sure.

JACK LINDSAY.

MAN AGAINST MYTH. BARROWS DUNHAM. Muller. 10s. 6d. THIS seems to me a catchpenny title for a book which, though extremely valuable, has very little to do with myth. 'Man against Myth!' The words evoke the division that haunts our time. Man and Nature, Matter and Spirit, Art and Science, these are only a few of the irreconcilable opposites in the world of ideas since Galileo, Newton, Copernicus, and Kepler measured the size of the earth and the sun, and the distance of the stars. Professor Lancelot Law Whyte deals with this subject in his book, *The Next Development of Man*, far better than I can do here.

If man had never created myths, if he had never seen himself as descended from heroes who journeyed through the world contenders with giants, conquerors of death, he would never have become Man at all. If he had not been the intimate of Gods, had not believed in magic, if nature and he had not been inseparable and the same, he would never have had the power to tame animals, cultivate the earth, control fire, or invent tools and machinery. Myth was man's first liberation.

But perhaps I am ranging beyond the scope of Professor Barrows Dunham's book, the purpose of which is to explode spacious modern artificial myths, popular misconceptions, distortions, falsifications. That you can't change human nature. That the rich are fit and the poor unfit. That there are superior and inferior races. That every question has two sides. That art and politics don't mix. That thinking makes it so. That you have to look after yourself. That all problems are

merely verbal. That words will never hurt me (I can imagine the horror of primitive man at that heresy). That you cannot be free and sage. Readers of *Life and Letters* will not need to be told the speciousness of these maxims, which are, I suppose, a sort of popular mythology, and yet will be able to appreciate Professor Barrows Dunham's brilliant logic.

He gives very cogent reasons why those who hold power at present should be concerned to disseminate these myths, which have a parallel in the popularly spread belief that art is something remote from life, a region for rare spirits instead of the liberation of the spirit of the ordinary man, which it was for the ancients.

The way he deals with the maxim, 'That there are two sides to every question' is typical of his method. First he makes a classification of the number of meanings this simple statement can have. 1, That major social issues divide mankind into two groups, each of which presents a certain amount of valid arguments and exhibits a certain amount of self-interest. 2, That in any given situation there is a plurality of equally good choices. 3, That all theories contain a certain amount of truth and a certain amount of error, and that therefore one ought to select a truth from this. 4, That taking sides destroys scientific impartiality. 5, That the more you understand of opposing theories, the more you are led to sympathize with the men who hold them. 6, That all parties to a controversy have a right to be heard. 7, That you should never come to a decision until you have thoroughly studied the issues. In effect he is saying that the maxim is so woolly and vague that it admits any number of interpretations, and the reader will be able to supply any number of his own.

The last interpretation he details is the only one he admits to be entirely valid. He divides those who believe in the maxim into wobblers and balancers, those who waver from one point of view to the other, and those who stand upon a conception of impartiality. On this, fourth, interpretation he is most cogent.

'Now scientific impartiality means the acceptance of knowledge of things as they are, without any distortion or prejudice. If, therefore, any form of social action is to be regarded as

destroying impartiality, it would have to be a form which prevents or corrupts the knowledge of things as they are. . . . Negatively stated, scientific impartiality means that you do not start with desired conclusions and invent reasons for them. It means, lastly, that we do not distort facts in order to maintain the programme of any party or group whatever. . . . It is not true that decision necessarily stultifies knowledge . . . with action our understanding is clarified and deepened; with inaction it fuses unused,' and whether or not one can completely agree with this last sentence, it cannot do other than disturb, and enrich our seeking.

You will see from this very inadequate quotation that Professor Barrows Dunham examines these maxims from a marxist, scientific standpoint, without, I think, the dogmatism and over-simplification that many marxists seem to find necessary, no doubt because they see themselves addressing a 'mass' far more ignorant and illiterate than they actually are. The Professor is completely logical. And yet one feels that he has no knowledge of that quite illogical and so far unpredictable manifestation of the human spirit that we call art: the Myth that can work miracles.

Man is reluctant to let go the myth of a man who can never die, or of a girl released from death and hell to come again in spring, or of a man or a god who once broke out of the tomb. For the force of the seasons do recur, and man refuses to be finally beaten. Above all man needs for his survival the myth that he is unconquerable, that he can and does change even though he remains fundamentally the same. Even though he faces the danger of his knowledge, and the energy of the atom remains in the hands of the power-drunk and greed-ridden, of men irretrievably bogged by economic laws that seem as inexplicable to them as the nature of nature and of life, Man does, in fact, rise from the dead every day.

Professor Barrows Dunham sees the myths he details as weapons in the armoury of fascism. And now fascism has suffered defeat in its own recognizable shape, and like Proteus continually changes that shape, we may have some difficulty in recognizing the enemy. So perhaps we should be glad of the catchpenny title, which has helped to sell 60,000 copies of the

book in Professor Dunham's native country of America, where myths, both progressive and retardative, find such fertile soil. Yet 60,000 copies in a vast country like the U.S.A. is a drop of oil in a vast ocean, or, if we are hopeful, a crumb of yeast in a vast loaf.

But the point about the myths that Professor Dunham does not mention, the myth of unconquerable heroes and of men who rise from the dead, is the fact that we know, in the core of a being uncorrupted by the sewerage of money-making cities, that these are not myths at all, but fundamental truth.

MAURICE CARPENTER

FOUR POEMS BY RIMBAUD: THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION. BEN BELITT. Sylvan Press. 7s. 6d.

THE ultimate testing of a poet is his text. This sounds so gross a platitude that a word of explanation is obviously wanting.

To take the case of Rimbaud—the case in question—it would seem that his influence and example has operated more in the field of living than in the field of composition. Countless young men have found in his existence an excuse for equating vice with genius, and hashish and homosexuality with vision. As an instance of this cult which centres more upon his person than his work, I discovered in the public library copy of Enid Starkie's *Rimbaud* I was recently re-reading, that while the much-stamped book contained no pencilled jottings, no marginalia on the poems or Miss Starkie's comments upon them, every illustrated plate had been torn out.

It is therefore with relief that we turn to Mr. Belitt's little book on the verbal problem of Rimbaud's genius, and how that genius may best be rendered in the dilute solution of the translator's art.

Taking the 'untranslatability' of the poet as his starting-point, Mr. Belitt tells us that he has sought 'to achieve "accuracy" within the spirit of the poetic process, and at times against the grain of the translated word'. This 'accuracy' has led Mr. Belitt to attempt the translation, not of words but of ideas; not of objects but of their relations. For example, in the literal version which he also provides, along with the French text, 'Ces arbrisseaux, brulés où bleuit la prunelle' is rendered

as 'These scorched shrubs where the wild plum goes blue', but in the poetically transformed version he speaks of the meadows 'Lifting a cinder of leaf to the blue of the plum'. In the former version, it will be seen, the separate images exist like the ingredients in a mixture—distinct, but adjacent, so to speak; while in the latter they combine like the elements in a compound, fusing to form a something which is new.

Mr. Belitt's translation, then, continually gives evidence of 'that synthetic and magical power', to which Coleridge desired 'to exclusively appropriate the name of imagination'. Lacking the formal quality which Mr. Norman Cameron, by the use of rhyme, imparts to his own translations of Rimbaud, Mr. Belitt—by means of Elizabethan language ('I dreamed the green night of extravagant snow')—better succeeds in conveying the vigour, the spate, and frenzy of Rimbaud's speech. I should hazard, too, that the syntax and diction of this American poet-translator has been appreciably influenced by a study of Hart Crane's verse—a figure who sometimes identified himself with the figure of the French poet, and whose own poetry testified to that likeness.

DEREK STANFORD

THE BADGER. ERNEST NEAL. *New Naturalist Monograph*. Illustrated. Collins. 12s. 6d.

M.I. is the first of the *New Naturalist* monographs. Being in all respects the little brother of the main series it is, thus, beautifully produced, with what can fairly be described as an exciting, fascinating, and remarkable set of Badger photographs, including an attractive Kodachrome frontispiece. Thus, too, it has a scientific bias, one-fifth of the book being taken up with tables, diagrams, appendices, etc.; and this particular naturalist would like to have had set before him a more bounteous feast of Ernest Neal's personal observations on Badger life, culled from the notes of his 341 hours in the field, two-thirds of which were at night. Only a fellow naturalist, perhaps, who has experienced the joys (and also the discomforts!) of intensive observation of wild animals, can fully appreciate what lies behind that bald statement of 341 hours' watching, and knows that in the end it is the actual

experiences, rather than the discovery of new facts, that live. However, if a complete monograph aims at presenting all the relevant facts on a given subject, then Ernest Neal has given us the full life history of a particularly interesting animal—so far as it is known; and if he sighs at his inability to fit glass roofs into the vast labyrinths of the Badgers' setts and provide them with electric lighting, or to devise means whereby the Badgers can be followed in their nocturnal rambles, well, that has been the sigh, and also the stimulus, of naturalists since the beginning; moreover, he has the satisfaction of knowing that much of their history he here reveals is either new, as a result of the patience and ingenuity of himself and his helpers, or confirms (and also rejects) finally earlier speculation and supposition. He proves conclusively that Badgers do not hibernate, nor even stay underground for more than two or three nights at a time, in the hardest winter southern England can produce, nor perhaps anywhere in Britain; though, in this respect, it is difficult to imagine on what they could feed in a Central Highland Glen, which may be both frost- and snow-bound for eight weeks at a stretch. (Incidentally, red squirrels may be seen abroad in the Highlands during days with zero temperatures). He also clears up problems associated with the Badger's mating, showing that it takes place normally in July or August, and that gestation is abnormally prolonged to a period of seven months, so that the cubs are born in February or March. But, from the Badgers' point of view, Neal's most valuable contribution is his extensive study of their food. This shows them to be harmless and actually beneficial in consuming quantities of young rabbits and insects and a variety of vegetable foods, while evidence of lamb-killing is almost non-existent. As in the case of golden eagle, buzzard, and great skua, there is widespread ignorance on this point, the wish being father to the thought and serving as a time-honoured excuse for bad shepherding and keeping. M.F.H.s, poultry-farmers and gamekeepers also please note that Badgers taking poultry and game-birds are the exception and not the rule.

Lack of space prohibits my dwelling upon Neal's most

interesting chapters, those containing his first-hand observations of Badgers—of their playgrounds 'among the rosebay willow-herb; of their remarkable cleanliness and sanitary arrangements; of their constant visiting of each other's setts and the curious practice of three or four pairs occupying one sett in August and September, after the mating and before the cubs go off on their own, while spring-cleaning their permanent residences and providing them with new bedding of bracken, leaves, moss, etc. But enough has been said, perhaps, to indicate the scope of a notable contribution to British natural history.

RICHARD PERRY

THE UNKNOWN MOUNTAIN. DON MUNDAY. Hodder and Stroughton. Price 21s.

FEW parts of the temperate zones can offer harder going than the Coast Range of British Columbia. From the seaward side there are, first, all the troubles of tide-rips and rapids in unmapped fiords narrower and taller than those of Norway. The racket at the river-bars can be heard miles away. Within, the muddy water hides water-logged tree-stumps and further on you come upon huge whirlpools occupying the whole channel, revolving in opposite directions and bristling with snags. Then, as you land to tug your boat—'line her', as they say—there are beds of quicksand looking just like caked mud. Walk on them and the surface splits into blocks and begins sinking into the ooze below. It is essential then to lie flat and roll to firmer ground. Somehow or other, you must force your way up interminable valleys which writhe down between 10,000 foot mountains. Their rivers can rise many feet in a night and without warning; their banks are spillikened with dead logs, platted with springy alders or spiked with the far-famed devil's club. Further on, there are red and slimey swamps through which you may wade waist-deep and tangles of tree trunks too big to be climbed over without cutting hand and footholds in them. All this to be penetrated under the unrelenting pressure of back-packs of 100 or more lb.

Arrived, in time, 30 miles or so in—each stretch done twice to bring in the loads, i.e. after 60 loaded and 30 unloaded

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

miles—the so-called weather of the Coast Range then sets in. If the deluge would' only cease there about you would be all you came for. You would be glorying in the view of it, instead of the wet blank walls of your tent, which the incredibly heavy down-winds are likely soon to rip. Cold heavy showers scourge you as you break camp. But then the weather seems to clear up as you finish packing. And you start out across a glacier. The snow surface, however, becomes literally invisible to the leader a yard in front of him, so dense and blinding is the mist. Throwing snowballs ahead to break and reveal the unseeable, you advance; but the snow is crusted merely. Thigh-deep at every other step you struggle onward; masked crevasses flank and maybe outflank you; too soon, though after hours of toil, an oppressive heat becomes all but overpowering. Returning to camp, an avalanche sweeps down, to splay out only a few yards away. Members of the party then begin dropping into crevasses. A strange sunset paints shadows an unearthly red. But there before them the majestic mass of 'Mystery Mountain' bulks against the last soft gleamings, which in that latitude do not dim before dawn.

On the way out mosquitos make one's hat grey; moraine crests break away suddenly under the foot; rivers horribly risen defeat your progress as provisions dwindled down to a bit of cheese. But bear tracks and trees gashed from their raking claws sometimes point to a foot log crossing. Islands on which you camp are swept away over night. Somehow or other you arrive, maybe, to find your cache'd boat less than a foot above water.

The first explorers of 'Mystery Mountain'—Mount Waddington, 13,260 ft., highest peak in British Columbia—are Don and Phyllis Munday, and some of their earliest adventuring in quest of it has just been summarized. To such day-in day-out struggles must be added grizzles, plagues of wasps' nests, clouts on the head from falling stones, high-altitude thunder in which axes and clothing shine with St. Elmo's fire, a glacial dam-burst that flooded their camp with the mercury at 36 degrees.

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equipment-making and provision-preparing are theirs. Their epoch-making trips recounted here were their own in a game where too often the true credit should go to others than the narrators. Don Munday's account of these notable achievements, does not hide his awareness of this. In his brief staccato paragraphs will be found a fine tribute to the heroine of many emergencies. The page is unforgettable on which—just as Don trips over a cliff-edge—Phyl charges a roaring brute of a grizzly and drives it bellowing off. There are occasionally some touches of impatience with the failings of not too able companions and some natural anxiety that credit should be given where credit is due. These touches, however, do not spoil this introduction to an extraordinary region in which none will now deny the Mundays their full pioneering rights.

DOROTHY PILLEY RICHARDS

THE GORSE GLEN. HUGH EVANS. (A translation of the Welsh *Cwm Eithin* by E. Morgan Humphreys.) Brythion Press. 8s. 6d.

IRON AND GOLD. HILDA VAUGHAN. Macmillan. 8s. 6d.

THE STILL WATERS. GWYN JONES. Peter Davies. 8s. 6d.

THESE three books are as different as can be, and at first sight it would appear labour wasted to wrap them together in the same bundle. But they have one thing in common: each is *about* rural Wales. Though a composite picture of that area is the least the reader gets from them; even the *Gorse Glen* which sets out to give an account of a North Wales farming community during the nineteenth century offers something more than photographic interest. In the other two books the scene is an integral part of the stories, which is perhaps as it should be in works of fiction.

The Gorse Glen is a translation in good, readable English of the Welsh *Cwm Eithin*. Hugh Evans' home was near the birth-place of Jac Glan-y-Gors, a revolutionary and satirist who was influenced by Tom Paine; and in his book he followed this radical tradition. His description of a rural community during the 'Hungry Forties', of families existing on leaves and boiled nettles, of the rack-renters and the double war of the Dissenting

**Three July
Selections**

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Janet Whitney, author of many well-known biographies, has written this story of the charming, vivacious lady who became wife to one American President and mother of another. It is a biography full of significant side-lights which have enabled Mrs. Whitney to mirror vividly the life and times of her subject. *Illus.* 15s. net

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A survey of the theatre from 1900 in which different schools of thought are considered and the main exponents of the drama described, together with the progress of repertory theatres and amateur groups. Seven admirable appendices and bibliographical and general notes. *Illus.* 10s. 6d. net

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The Restless Voyage

This is a supplemented and re-indited version of the *Wanderings in Five Oceans from 1806 to 1812 of Archibald Campbell, Seaman*, first published in 1816. Stanley Porteus is an authority on many of the places and peoples described and the book itself is likely to stand as a full-blooded adventurous autobiography. 10s. 6d. net

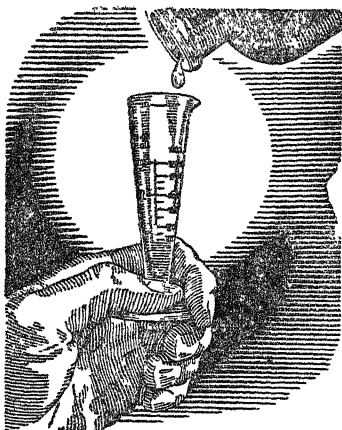
STANLEY PORTEUS

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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

peasants against the alliance of parson and landlord, is a document of value to the social historian and would in itself justify the book's translation. This section does for rural North Wales what Ness Edwards in his *History of the South Wales Miners* does for the industrial South. Another section, which is illustrated, deals with rural industries; another with folklore and customs. The final chapter on *Religion in Cwm Eithin* is of less interest to the reader who is not conversant with the warring sects of Dissent or concerned with the plight of Anglicanism fighting rearguard actions in a hostile terrain. Hugh Evans died fifteen years ago, but one would have little difficulty in reconstructing his personality from this book. It shows a countryman, shrewd, independent, and humorous, who made his book as he would have made a gate or a milking-stool: plain, solid, and built to last.

The Gorse Glen shows the rural scene in a cold, harsh light. In *Iron and Gold* the light is Faerie, 'mystic wonderful.' Miss Hilda Vaughan has taken as the thread of her story the legend of the lady of the lake; the immortal who rises from the lake and brings her lover, a young peasant who is also a poet, a dowry of cattle that makes him prosperous. She brings immortal gold to his mortal iron. But the iron bites and the gold tarnishes and she returns after a lifetime of 'mortality' to the lake, together with her cattle. It is the old legend of the circle of life: in birth out of the waters of the womb, back in death to the waters of Mother Earth; and it is the kind of archetypal theme used by story-tellers all over the world. But Miss Vaughan's expansion of it into a novel dilutes rather than humanises the legend. She appears to be working the opposite way to the natural story-tellers who over the ages have progressively shorn the folk-tale of realistic detail, leaving it bare and abstract. The tale is set in the 'normal life of a hill farm' but the iron doesn't mix with the gold—it never could—and the tale's weak point seems to be in the original conception rather than in the telling. The two lovers, Owain and Glythin, are drawn with fine skill. Glythin as a type of her sex, poetic, forbearing, and long-suffering, attracts sympathy, but like her husband one is a little uneasy with the Faerie part of her. The book's jacket has beautiful design by Eric Fraser.



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The Still Waters is Gwyn Jones' second book of short stories, and shows that the artistry of *The Buttercup Field* is still very much at the tip of his pen. There are ten stories in the book, two of them long ones: *The Green Island* and *The Prisoners*. The first is the centre-piece of the collection and again illustrates Gwyn Jones' remarkable sense of scene. *The Green Island* vibrates in the light of a West Coast sunset where hard and soft tones blend momentarily into a super-real unity. It is a tale of sexual violence contrasted with the grandeur of the setting. *The Prisoners* has the same magic. This is a story of frustrated love with a German Prisoner of War as a bystander who provides an implicit commentary. Yet some of the stories in this collection lack the spontaneity of the earlier volume, as though in writing all the emotion out of a character or a situation the pen is being pressed a little too hard. A story which shows Gwyn Jones' real mastery is *A White Birthday*; simple, restrained, not a word is wasted in its telling, and very much more comes out of it than the surface narrative suggests. The end of the story is the starting point of the real story in the mind of the reader. The feeling about the two longer stories is that they end with the last printed word; that they don't 'stay with you'. *The White Birthday* and *Down in the Forest Something Stirred*, a delightful piece of comedy, will stay a very long time.

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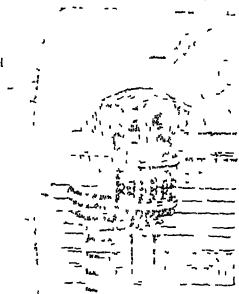
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LIFE AND LETTERS

continuing The London Mercury
edited by Robert Herring

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EDITORIAL

August, 1949

WE are an island race and accused, I often think overmuch, of being insular. It is true that few English know as much of French literature as is both their duty and opportunity. We are, as a race, woefully ignorant of Spanish authors on the one hand, of Northern on the other. Occasionally, an Ibsen or a Goethe breaks through our defences, and now at last Hermann Hesse, Switzerland's Nobel prize-winner, has been translated into English. But by and large, we do not care very much what is going on overseas, either in art or politics, until too late, and in art 'too late' means when it has become fashionable. Current, or lately current interest in, say, Kafka or Kierkegaard, is with us as a whole less a matter of intellectual curiosity than of fashion and, therefore, laziness.

The one exception to this has always been Italy. The English connection with Italy has been continuously strong. We have progressed uninterruptedly from the Grand Tour to Futurism, to Duse, to Pirandello, to Croce—allowing him to influence us more, I would hazard, than we ever did Bergson—so that one of the more evident of the lesser benefits of the cessation of hostilities a few years ago was the reopening of the door to Italy and the no longer being deprived of 'the Italian air', a fact to which an Italian himself draws attention in this number.

There are many things for which the English go to Italy. Over and above them all, containing and crystallizing them all, is painting. A painting must be framed and the frame must hang on a wall. That wall cannot exist by itself, it must be part of a building. Less materially, and more essentially, our minds must be that painting's wall, our imagination its frame. Neither can be made without knowledge, and unless the tradition of the cultural link between England and Italy is to become merely picturesque, pleasing but not practical, that painting cannot hang, unframed, in a vacuum. For this reason, there will be found more articles than usual in this issue, for the whole of which we are indebted to the help of Signora Maria-Luisa Astaldi, of the review *Ulisse*, and to Dr. Bernard Wall and his team of translators. To them I must happily tender sincere and admiring thanks.

TWO FREEDOMS

G. B. ANGIOLETTI

(Translated by Bernard Wall)

LAST year Professor C. M. Bowra, who has a chair of poetry at Oxford, told me something about the new generation of university men who have gone up since the war. Bowra is an intelligent man, a sensitive critic, and eminently in a position to grasp the subtle nuances of various types of character. And judging by his sympathetic personality students must find him an easy person to confide in. So we ought to pay attention to what he says. He affirms that undergraduates in England to-day are not keen on the exact sciences, indeed are rather bored by anything remotely 'technical' (above all the application of 'technics' to politics—as happens nowadays in some countries). Instead they feel a growing attraction to literature and the arts. Their reading in the poetry and literature of all periods is wide. They put real passion into the study of texts, and they learn to recite Aeschylus in Greek and Plautus in Latin for the university plays they themselves produce.

For an Italian it was even more interesting to know (and here other English intellectuals agree with Professor Bowra) that Italy fascinates the young Englishmen of to-day more than ever before. They no longer merely feel a romantic urge towards the South and a rather conventional and (for us) irritating love for the picturesque and inevitable 'sunny' landscape, for the undeniably 'glorious' survivals of a lost civilization. To-day Italy's fascination comes from the desire to live in a *human* climate, to feel *free* in a country where freedom seems to be achieved less by laws than by the spirit and character of the people.

When I returned from my visit to England and made observations of this kind, some of my fellow-countrymen were surprised. But others had already noticed the delight of young Englishmen who came to Italy during the war—delight at

Italian popular vitality, at the hand-to-mouth way in which we resolved our problems of living, without pedantry and with scarcely a trace of organization or preparation. And this though, as everyone knows, England herself is hostile to the teutonic taste for meticulous system and has reacted victoriously against it.

These educated young people maintain that life in Italy seems sincerer than in other countries; it is more spontaneous, more genuine, and hence more poetical in the ancient almost mythical meaning of the word. Italians have an immediate feeling for human truth, something very different from truth as drawn out of imponderable concepts and unnatural abstractions; and from time to time the Italian citizen measures himself by that human truth without getting too involved in arid moral 'don't's'. Thanks to this spirit and the adoption of solutions which are provisional but adequate to the given situation, the Italian feels he is responsible for his own actions, and is deeply free and happy. Even though his standard of living may be lower than elsewhere and his privations sometimes cause him agony and suffering.

Such is the view I heard either from young Englishmen directly or from their tutors. But as I have already suggested, we Italians feel a little puzzled to hear ourselves praised for freedom in this way. Many of my fellow-countrymen maintain that we are less free than the English. This view is upheld not only by Italians in Italy who have adopted it second-hand, but also by those living in England who can observe for themselves. One or two Italian students at Oxford told me that in their opinion freedom was a profoundly English attribute and that elsewhere, especially in Italy, there is only a rough imitation of it—almost a parody. Their English fellow-students, they said, made freedom into a profession and an art; to do this they applied all the rules and standards that distinguish good artists and professional experts from mere dilettanti. Here I couldn't help agreeing that Italian freedom has a good deal of the dilettante spirit of improvisation about it.

But when it came to giving an instance of the subtlety of English freedom my young fellow-countrymen were remarkably hesitant and seemed almost embarrassed. In the end they

confessed that the English kind of freedom had multiplied its rules and standards so much that it had finally turned into something almost academic. This had happened at the expense of the free play of inspiration and imagination that ought to go hand-in-hand with daily existence and give it fresh life. To give one example: they told me that their English fellow-students would find it intolerable if the Italians stayed indoors to rest or think—not to say study—while they were out on the river training for the next Eights. In other words it was the *duty* of the Italians to play their part in that *freely chosen* enterprise. Just as it was their *duty* to enjoy themselves *freely* at football or it was their *duty* to express their *free* opinion in any argument that arose—even though they personally preferred to stay silent in a corner and listen (or, being good Italians, to criticize the views of the others in private). In a nutshell, there was a strange and gentle form of tyranny.

In this way I began to understand why English students returning from Italy prefer our kind of freedom to theirs. Not only because of the normal discontent everyone feels about his own circumstances and the habit of shutting one's eyes to the advantages of one's own country, but also because returning Englishmen have seen that in our country freedom is realized in a more imaginative and unpredictable—a less socialized—way, and that it involves certain risks and personal dangers which are attractive.

But it may be that friends in England forget that we are just as discontented with our own state of affairs. We have something to envy them for: long habit has made their discipline so spontaneous that it is hardly noticeable.

If our freedom is spontaneous and our motto 'Live and let live', their spontaneity lies in respect due to others and they could take as their motto: 'Live well, live in the best possible way, but see that you don't upset anyone else.' It is not enough merely to 'let others live'; we need to make our propinquity tolerable.

What we do by nature the English do by taking thought. And so the feeling for independence that safeguards the personal life of Italians is by the English put to the service of a well-organized society in which each one is free but not at the

G. B. ANGIOLETTI

expense of others. No one should conclude that English freedom is more valuable than ours or vice versa. It seems to me that we should aim at both, at both the Italian and the English kinds of freedom. And we should try to avoid the excesses to which blind surrender to one or the other kind would lead. We should avoid both a riot of individualistic isolation and the idea of duty as an end in itself; and thus gain the pleasure of achieving the freedom that is the finest flower of our daily round.

GIOVAN BATTISTA ANGIOLETTI was born in Milan in 1896. His works include *Il Giorno del Giudizio*, *Donata*, *Narciso*, and *La Memoria*. For over five years he edited the well known literary periodical *Fiera Letteraria*.

ITALIAN LITERATURE BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

MARIA-LUISA ASTALDI

(Translated by Muriel Grundrod)

IN the confusion following on the first World War, which was further complicated in Italy by the survivals of D'Annunzianism and by the uncertain stammerings of the 'crepuscolari', the movement centring round the *Ronda* played an important part in raising and clarifying literary standards. It was the aim of the 'Rondisti' to bring dignity and a universal quality into Italian literature through respect for tradition, humanity of feeling, and a wise choice of language.

A most important aspect of the tenets of the 'Rondisti' is to be found in Vincenzo Cardarelli's reflections on the Italian language, prompted by his reading of Leopardi's works, and put forward as an alternative to the old Manzonian formula of a language forcibly adopted from Florentine usage. In a few lucid pages which still merit the consideration of Italians to-day, he outlines the ideal of a historical and literary language maintaining its living quality, not through popular usage, nor through the conversation of cultivated Florentines, but through the works of writers who assume the whole responsibility for it.

This openly voiced demand for a new dignity of expression resulted in the search for a new style. This led to the first encounter between the two opposing factions of the 'calligrafi' and the 'contentutisti', that is to say, between those who laid the main emphasis on form and those who attached greater importance to content. Another centre of dispute was the 'magical realism' of Massimo Bontempelli. This movement can perhaps best be described as a reaction against realism. Writers and artists, weary of making accurate photographic reproductions of facts, passions and situations as they actually

appeared, decided to be governed in future by imagination rather than reality. Movements of a similar character were growing up during this period throughout Europe. The visual arts were the first to assimilate the new doctrines, and everywhere a taste for metaphysical painting arose, which in its turn soon influenced literature, drama, the cinema, house-furnishing, theatrical scenery, and even humour and dress.

Bontempelli, the founder of 'magical realism', used to say that his intention was to 'invent myths anew'. What did he mean by this? He meant that his aim was to reintroduce the element of wonder into art (had not Leopardi written 'Wonder, the chief source of pleasure in art?'), to discover anew a state of childhood, of innocence, and enthusiasm ready to undertake a work of art or to receive its impact. He wanted to repudiate ethico-philosophical systems, the whole æstheticopsychological baggage, in fact 'culture' as a whole, and with it, too, any preoccupation about life-likeness or adherence to the models. The great success of detective and adventure stories at that time seemed to suggest that if the unwilling reader was to be brought back to literature reality must be abandoned in favour of the fabulous, the incredible, and the extraordinary. The magical realism that later took the name of 'novecento' did not do much towards winning over many readers, but it did help to create a new means of expression and a new taste for prose corresponding to the new way of seeing and interpreting the world, from which was born the literary genre known as 'prosa d'arte o capitolo'. Applying somewhat tardily Benedetto Croce's formula, certain critics decided that in future the value of a work of fiction should be reckoned, not so much by its structure, its life-like characters, or the setting of its problems and scenes, but rather exclusively according to how much it contained of poetic emotion. Thus it came about that great novelists were read and judged purely by excerpts, and appreciated only because of certain descriptive passages; and fiction as such, because of the demands it made in the way of construction, plot, and characterization, was viewed askance. At the same time, certain writers of the acute, painstaking, and elegant variety acquired a reputation, for example women writers such as

Gianna Manzini, endowed more than men with that quality of tension which dilates and transfigures the particular object towards which it is directed but less gifted than men as to construction, method, and synthesis.

In this way the sole literary criterion came to lie in whether a work was 'poetic' or not, and a delicate network of communications developed between prose and poetry—so much so that, as poetry had by that time already cast off all formal rules, in the final result it became impossible to set up any strict definition of their respective spheres. It soon became obvious wherein lay the pitfalls of such a situation: the writer squandered himself in a sort of craving for sensation, in a search for rather precious refinements, in hieroglyphics. These pitfalls were especially dangerous in relation to the novel, a form of literature which, by its very extra-artistic nature, derives its *raison d'être* from life itself.

Such was the situation in the nervy and restless years preceding the second World War. The majority of the public had become alienated from literary matters. Thus the way was open for the influence and suggestion of that latest poetic novelty, 'ermetismo', or hermetical writing, the essence of whose art lay in analogy, in rhythmic ingenuities, and in close-packed methods of expression. In this connection one may recall the formalism which had been forced upon Italy by the totalitarian government, and it is sometimes suggested that young writers had recourse to these complicated technical flights as an outlet because they lacked the liberty to express themselves in ordinary forms. In reality, however, the famous Fascist censorship must have been pretty stupid and negligent if in those very years it was possible for Moravia to publish such a novel as *La Mascherata*, a patent satire of dictatorship even down to the obvious references to the dictator's love-affairs.

Be that as it may, writing became more and more obscure by under-currents of implications. Links essential to the reader's understanding were simply omitted, while passages were artificially joined together or torn apart to a degree which rivalled the contortions of an acrobat. Writers even went to the length of introducing a new use of adjectives, the

effect of which was both ambiguous and completely out of keeping with the spirit of the Italian language; and when this method was also applied in the sphere of art criticism confusion was complete. In fact, it was far from being meant as a joke when someone proposed the compilation of a glossary to assist towards understanding the texts that saw the light in those ill-omened years.

Ill-omened they were, for they ended with the war and with Italy's defeat. To-day, at a distance of ten years, we can see how sterile all those literary experiments were. And, in effect, with the restoration of left-wing parties as an integral part of the country's life, people began to feel the need of a culture that would no longer be divorced from the demands and searchings of the masses themselves—for a culture in touch with life, even an instrument of emancipation, which in Bacon's words, would be directed towards improving the human state: *commodis humanis inservire*, with 'commoda' understood as including æsthetic pleasure too.

Hermetical writing, if it is identified with a polished style and with a complicated and *outré* method of expression, is a phenomenon which, broadly speaking, can be described as reactionary, or linked with the modes of a past era. It goes back a long way—perhaps to the days of baroque pomp, of starched collars, to the period of proud Spanish domination in which Italian poetry became confined to the Courts and the Academies.

Once the country began to breathe again after all the disasters of the war, the preference soon showed itself for stories of real life, for first-hand accounts of actual experiences. Hence the succession of diaries, memoirs, and biographies: not only the diaries, rich in anecdotes, of famous people or prominent leaders, but also the diaries of artists, who lived apart from the great doings of their times and whose main significance lies in their portrayal of the inner life. At the same time there also arose a widespread and indiscriminate enthusiasm for American novels, many of which were already known in Italy through the enterprising publisher Bompiani, who, even during the war, published a large anthology of American novelists.

In these novels the qualities of violence, outspokenness, obscenity, giving free rein to elementary instincts, all seemed at first something splendid, an expression of youth, ardour, and optimism. Now, after the flood of translations, adaptations and imitations, crimes and murderous brutalities no longer provide a thrill. But they certainly performed a function at that time. Through all those cries and blows and alarms literature became once more present and actual, not escapist, and the novel was imbued again with love of living. It should, however, be said that the most important Italian novelists were influenced neither by hermetical writing (though they still took some account of it) nor by a blind adherence to the American cult. Instead, the country's disastrous experiences seem rather to have produced a longing for greater moral concreteness, a need to bring back the spirit to forgotten spheres.

Apart from the writers of the 'old guard' such as Alfredo Bacchelli and that incomparable essayist *Emilo Cecchi* (the latter specially known for his work in the field of English literature), Italian writers who enjoy an international reputation to-day include *Alberto Moravia*, *Guido Piovene*, and *Corrado Alvaro*. *Piovene* may be compared with the English Catholic writers in that he squarely confronts the Catholic standpoint with the most burning problems of our times. *Alvaro*, a Calabrian, is an unusual writer who depicts Southern Italy, not in its external and colourful aspects, but as the scene of two dramatically contrasting elements—the primitive surroundings and mentality coming up against the forces of modernity and culture.

In the same tradition as *Alvaro* is a young Sardinian writer, *Giuseppe Dessì*. Other writers of the younger generation seem to be attracted towards experiments vaguely reminiscent of *Kafka* and other Central Europeans; *Dino Buzzati* is an example of this trend. Mention must also be made of the type of humorous writing which has grown up in Italy in the last ten years, perhaps as a result of the unhappy series of illusions and disappointments in which the country found itself involved, and against which it is still struggling. This trend was completely unknown in the previous generation,

and its exponents include writers of the most varying backgrounds and temperaments.

MARIA-LUISA ASTALDI was born in Friuli. Writer and essayist. For the last three years she has been editing the Rome review *Ulisse* with Rafaele Cantù. She has written a number of novels and a long essay on the contemporary novel in Italy called *Nascita e vicende del romanzo italiano*. She has also translated various works into Italian, including Barbellion's *Journal of a Disappointed Man*.

A SYNTHESIS OF THE ITALIAN ART OF TO-DAY

VIRGILIO GUZZI

(*Translated by Archibald Colquhoun*)

THE great Italian artistic tradition was the fruit of a lay humanistic culture interpenetrated with the ideals and political, social, and religious practice of the Catholic church; but in the romantic and naturalistic nineteenth century it was reduced to a series of regional experiments. These gave it a certain fresh life, but even so its productions sank to secondary importance compared with the way the French school flowered and proved itself and became greater. Our nineteenth-century painters lacked the simple formal principal, the renewal of the colour-structure of light, which was at the basis of impressionism; they understood the new reality as an abbreviation, a simplification, or a description of detail. The realism of Naples, the loose freedom of Lombardy, the spotted ('Macchia') school of Tuscany had produced valuable results; but they were certainly not enough to support the weight of that illustrious tradition, or to put Italy in the centre of the artistic movement of Europe. But the worst came when the regional schools were superseded by an internationalism which was the modern spirit gone commonplace, a pseudo impressionistic facility, a showy sensualism; this was also sometimes mixed with a certain sentimental or rhetorical idealism, an ambition, which no longer had foundation, to be decorative and grandiose.

The Italian artistic spirit, which was still producing talented painters like Mancini and Spadini between the end of the nineteenth and the first years of this century, was finally to give these bad habits a violent shake-up with the futurist movement. It was to shake the traditionalism that, because it was imbued with such second-rate romantic principles, had so little to do with our traditions; which reduced realism to

literalness, and made nature seem all sentiment and optical illusion, even when—as in divisionism—it tried to develop a mystical sense of wonder or a scientific style.

Futurism was undoubtedly an idealistic revolt; the need was coming back into Italian art to rise above the observation and enjoyment of the efforts of the imagination. Artists like Carrà, Soffici, Severini, and Boccioni took part in those early struggles (1910). It was a courageous group which quickly showed, by the way it conducted the struggle, that it considered art as an activity which involved the whole man, who must before all else be a modern man. It was, with the end of naturalism and literalism (social art had produced very poor results indeed), the end of Italy being considered provincial, as indeed it had been. It was the first appearance of the problem of the city and of machinery in the artist's mind; and the first reaching out, along this path, towards a new Europeanism. Impressionist and post-impressionist values (pointillisme, Cézannism) finally came into this breaking-up and forming of abstractions from visible reality. Carrà liked the Gallery of Milan, that dark and glittering mass of glass; Soffici liked the arc-lamps and the country at night; Boccioni the heroic motion and decomposition of matter; Severini the festivals and spectacles (in a way following on Seurat) of city-life. These fell into a society with too much of a taste for pastoral painters and painters of charm. *Leonardo La Voce*, and finally *Lacerba* were the reviews that went with the renewal of the figurative arts in Italy. It was a real renewal of the whole culture, and in the first place, of philosophic thought which was quick to get involved on its own account in the affairs of art. The idealist aesthetic of Croce confirmed and clarified, at the beginning of the century, the principle of the artist's spiritual freedom before nature; it fixed the formal essence of art with great clarity, and its autonomy (in the order which the philosopher later called 'the circularity of the spirit') from physics, hedonism, ethics, and logic. The times with us were more than ripe for the fulfilment of an art which was all 'phantasy', made up of pure images. There was a reaction against the weight of a history (or tradition) which by now was only rhetoric and bad habit; while science too

had contributed to drawing art away from any attempt at visual experiment. The photograph, for example, could already be considered, with its humility, as a rival to be feared of the picture. Ideas which would have produced a romantic, realistic art at the beginning of the nineteenth century, now, in the first years of the twentieth century, caused (because of the changed historical circumstances) an absolutely clear division from what is called nature. Futurism destroyed the visible object in order to create a utopian abstract image of movement. This was a release of energy which, in the best cases, gave new dimensions to space, with the object flashing about inside, snatched away and shattered as if in a chaos. Historical reality and natural present reality were cancelled out in a defence and exhalation of matter. This new vision also brought the problems of technique into discussion. The movement against tradition even acted as a movement against painting, when it produced the so-called 'polimateric' experiment.

There was a great deal of truth in all this, but many contradictions too. The phenomenon, the object of impressionism and naturalism, was replaced by an intellectual congestion of the inventive faculties. The crisis of human reality and of the relations between man and nature was beginning in Italy too. A reality which is not reflected definitely and firmly in natural reality is just conceited subjectivism, and opens the way to sheer phantasy.

Metaphysical painting, which followed futurism, interpreted this need of a myth. It opposed chaotic mechanism as it did the decadent and by now discredited poetry of imitation. The pictures of De Chirico (which are known everywhere) are an attempt, on the one hand, at recomposing a traditional, perspective spaciousness, and on the other express the enjoyment of a new, magic, composed, symbolic, and theatrical subjectivity. The crash of the plastic dynamism of futurism was succeeded by a scenic silence, an ironical, artificial tradition. The need to reflect some actuality, which was the good or bad in futurism, became an urge for historical colour. The machine had scarcely been discovered and expressed than it gave way to the lay-figure, posing against the humanistic

background of the 'Italian piazzas'. What redeemed this new experiment from the suspicion of being academic was its strange mythological content. The technique is that of the fifteenth century painting, as is also the idea of space. But the state of mind of the painter is entirely modern; it is absolutely impregnated with irony.

In this way Italian painting drew definitely away from the forms of impressionism, and from the love of life, present reality. Of course there were still painters like Tosi or De Pisis who were able to bring the taste for impressionism up to date, by mixing it with hints from Cézanne, Bonnard, and the 'Fauves', or by increasing its intensity by the use of surrealist or metaphysical themes (see, for example, the open-air still-lives, on the beach, by De Pisis). But the deeper broader current was the one which led to the open sea of stylism and anti-naturalistic imagination, to the mythology of the object. Carra and Morandi also painted metaphysically with De Chirico. Tradition was talked about once again; the taste for volume, for fine line, for spacial measurement was rediscovered. The review for this period was *I Valori Plastici*.

Meanwhile, on his own, in Paris, Amedeo Modigliani from Livorno, after studying the primitive Venetians and Siennese and the construction of Cézanne, was discovering the entirely modern values of chromatic space and line, and was inventing a type of painting which was both sad and irrational in its simple content.

The idealistic premises of Italian figurative culture (parallel to that of the rest of Europe) had shown its detachment from 'nature' and even from history, by futurism, and had reduced the action of the imagination to an illusion that it could create time and space simultaneously. It now led those who were anxious to rediscover the old, still suggestive, rules of art, to search for a past that was further away than modern empiricism. Modigliani had appreciated negro art, in Paris, with the first cubists. In Italy the Primitives were talked about again; Giotto and Paolo Uccello and the Ferrarese painters of the fifteenth century were rediscovered. Painters, such as our metaphysicals, must not be blamed for hearing tradition calling to them again; for having, in fact, gone right round the field

of experiment and search for various styles. This field was getting wider and wider elsewhere, and Picasso drew it into the whole field of human knowledge, into, one might almost say, universal history. Our painters used simple forms and feelings. When they went back to the past (although De Chirico was always to remain a learned painter); they found themselves 'archaic' again.

The spirit was detaching itself from contemporary reality, was becoming, that is to say, anti-realistic. It was dreaming of balance and silence, magic and mystery; it was 'recalling' a state of ancient solitude and purity, and in this found its full definition and form. Some painters, like Campigli, tried to be really erudite in their archaism, and shut themselves into the Egyptian and Etrusco-Roman museums, thus sliding into pure æstheticism. Others were romantic in a different way, like Sirone, and produced a type of painting that was more expressionist and elemental; in some of his 'City views' he was able to express, rather crudely, the squalor of his period, and at the same time his yearning for detachment. In the same way sculpture, which had descended to pure illustration between the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, now found the road of the Roman and Etruscan museum again, with Arturo Martini and afterwards with Marino Marini. This archaism first expressed itself in a love of story-telling and a certain picturesque, fabulous metaphysic; then in a taste for shut-in, broken-up forms, and in a sensual hermeticism.

But the metaphysical experiment was in its turn a bridge to new plastic ideas and intentions.

Soffici wrote, after the First World War: 'I have come back from the war a new man.' It is not surprising if in a country like Italy, with its ancient solemn humanistic tradition, a suspicion should arise at a certain moment of the forms of art and of tendencies which were based on a kind of cosmopolitan barbarism (which in fact urged the spirit beyond history and civilization). These forms and tendencies could also be expressed in superb works of abstract art, and profited, particularly in France, from an important modern tradition. This had begun with impressionism and belonged to a figurative culture

which was more mature, freer from prejudices, and more complex. But it was not only in Italy that a need was felt, about 1920, for a withdrawal to more 'human' positions. The 'Portrait of my Wife' (the two words together are significant) by the painter Picasso, carried out in the style of Ingres, was done in 1919; and his phase of expressionist classicism belongs to the years immediately afterwards. We mention this to make it clear that the polemics about so-called 'twentieth century painting', which changed backwards and forwards from a return to nature to a return to tradition, made the return we have just mentioned to the human and the real, before its roots in the general state of Italian spirit and culture found a political expression. Severini painted his neo-classic 'Pulcinella' in Paris, and acquired the name of an 'Italian' painter. Casorati, in Turin, is culture in close touch with modern experience, expressed it in an elegant dream-laden, ironic view of reality. He humanized the lay-figure of the metaphysics, and made it sensual; he made the distortions of the expressionists graceful and ironic; he used the specialized palette of the 'Fauves' and the Cubists, and even went back to Gauguin. Soffici made Cézanne Tuscan; and the influence of Massacio returned with Carrà. Rhetoric was mingled with a sincere nostalgia; there was a tendency to go back to national tradition, in a world that was getting more universal in its depth and extent, geographically and historically. Painting like Rosai's appeared (which gave a popular spirit to the language of Soffici and Carrà); Bartolini's etchings came out, and expressed a humble sensual nature seen with the romantic sincerity of personal confession, shut away as it was in some secret diary. And gradually the narrow steep lanes of Strapaese appeared, and the satire of Maccari; it might be called a deformed reality full of character; a reality which started as humble and provincial, and which broadened out more and more until it touched the margins of European culture.

The danger of a school, which conceals itself under a polemic in favour of tradition, is of what is called realism; by which I mean the dividing of the unity of form and content; when, that is, from an intellectual love of moral content, political or otherwise, form is eventually sacrificed, and con-

sidered as being itself a degenerate content (however actual or modern it may be). This danger was felt and foiled with genius by the painter Scipione, who, together with Mafai, broke through the bonds of the hermetic and geometrical, and of archaism, disinterested himself from his surroundings, and plunged himself completely, with romantic dash, into a reality which was dazzling and emotional and sensual at the same time. He was trying to be a kind of mirror (a distorting mirror, however) of contemporary custom. Through him a vein of surrealism flowed into Italian painting; his melancholy expressionist touches heralded the decline of irony and of platonic detachment from living and contemporary life, and showed a kind of moral suffering, a disquiet of the intellect and of the exasperated, eager, flesh. The painter was decadent, morbid, and dramatic, and had only a very short life. But the new generation were awakened to new discoveries after him, they found a thread of romantic humanity again, got a new insight into painting as colour, and drew back nearer to impressionism and post-impressionism. Mafai found a rather vague fabulous vision, and with Morandi the image came out into the light until it almost lost body.

This drawing near to visible nature led once more to a rediscovery of the recent European tradition, and in the first place of the 'fauves' and of impressionism. This is the point, for instance, from which the painting of Bartolini started. The young painters in Turin (Menzio, Levi) were 'Fauves'; in Rome Pirandello contrasted the encroachment of a broken-up, sensual nature, with memories of Braque, and touched a kind of expressionist hallucination.

This was slow and ungrateful work for young Italian artists. It was a question once more of discovering the true values of nineteenth century art and of making contact with the art of their contemporaries. Sculpture, meanwhile, had got over its archaic period, and was going back with Giacomo Manzù to the font of romantic luminism (who was Medardo Rosso in Italy). It was going back to a taste for fragmentation, and to the love of a truth in which physical and moral life are subordinated to luminous space; with Pericle Fazzini it returned to the search for volume in the rhythm of line, and

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became solidier inside, with some reluctant concessions to abstraction.

But expressionism which was undoubtedly the means, at a certain moment, by which they drew near to the world of live present nature again, soon exhausted itself in a pale evocative sensualism. In this crisis the need of a renewed sense of construction was felt. So young artists discovered Cubism and Picasso. Now, after the war, we have a new wave of abstract art along with these experiments in the manner of Picasso and the Cubists. The very young recall the experiments of futurism and show themselves anxious to draw nearer to the European masters of the abstract. It is a moment of intense polemical life, from which, it is to be hoped, may spring a new and intense figurative art.

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THE REVIVAL OF MUSIC IN ITALY

MASSIMO MILA

(Translated by Muriel Grundrod)

VIEWED in perspective, musical life during the nineteenth century in the main countries of Europe seems to have been largely dominated by the phenomenon of German romanticism, with its exceptional depth and perfection of expression, especially as to harmony and instrumentation. In a certain sense it is an uncontrovertible fact that German music during most of the nineteenth century was far in advance of that of other countries; but towards the end of the century a reversal of this position became apparent, when the fervour of the German creative impulse began to exhaust itself and other countries gradually took the lead. From the middle of the last century musical development in Italy, France, and England can be seen as the story of those countries' attempts to reach the same level of musical culture which the Germans had achieved thanks to their remarkable and uninterrupted sequence of musical geniuses from Haydn to Brahms.

Consequently, a certain similarity is to be found in musical developments and landmarks in these three countries; though with the difference that in France and Italy this incipient musical revival coincided with the decline of their great operatic period and had therefore, to some extent, to forge its way against the current of a robust national tradition; whereas in England the task was made relatively easy by the fact of starting practically from scratch to recover that faculty of musical creation which had lain dormant there for nearly two centuries. Modern music in England was thus able to consolidate its position in an atmosphere of sympathy and favourable expectation, without having recourse to those polemics which were found necessary in Italy and France in

order to combat the resistance of a conservative public, strongly attached to the traditions of a great operatic past.

France was the first to put the attempt into effect, and her musical development during the second half of the last century affords an interesting example. A simple comparison of dates will serve to show that for a period of some thirty years, between 1860 and 1890, there existed simultaneously in France an old but dying musical tradition, centring essentially round opera, and a new trend, developing with its own individual characteristics, but also influenced by German romanticism. These thirty years include both the rise of the innovators—from César Franck to Vincent d'Indy, from Lalo to Saint Saëns, Fauré and Debussy—and the deaths of the last representatives of the traditional opera, such as Auber, Gounod, and Ambrose Thomas.

Auber, the composer of *Fra Diavolo*, died in 1871, when César Franck was 49, Lalo 48, Saint-Saëns 36, and Fauré 26. At the death of Ambrose Thomas, the composer of *Mignon*, which now seems like an album of yellowed photographs of our grandmothers' days, Debussy was 34, and had already written the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune* and the *Chanson de Bilitis* and was working on *Pelléas*. Nor should one think of those traditionalists as mere survivals; on the contrary, they exercised a real dictatorship over the key positions of French musical life, the Opéra, the Opéra Comique, and the Conservatoire. Suffice it to say that for 54 years—from 1842 to 1896—the direction of the Paris Conservatoire was in the hands of only two men, first Auber and subsequently Ambrose Thomas.

In Italy the first attempt to bring Italian music into line with the level reached by the German romantic composers took place not much later than its French counterpart, but—let us have the courage to admit it—it failed. The relevant conditions differed considerably in the two countries. In the traditional camp, Verdi was a very different matter from Ambrose Thomas. Among the innovators, on the other hand, the contrast told in the opposite direction: neither Sgambati nor Martucci was a César Franck or a Debussy. In Italy the representative of the old operatic tradition was too great, too

vital, and indeed also was perfectly capable of evading the narrow tenets of a conventional past in order to follow in his own way, and even to initiate, modern musical developments.

On the other hand, Martucci (1841-1914) and Sgambati (1856-1909), the Italian apostles of the symphony, despite their undeniable merits as musical educators, never succeeded in making themselves felt as a vital force in nineteenth century Italian music as did their counterparts in France. Their efforts lay in the direction of culture rather than of art; they placed the chief emphasis on form—on giving Italy symphonic and chamber music—rather than on the living and modern quality of musical expression, whether in opera or in symphony. And even in their efforts to generate new standards of taste they were already old-fashioned. Between 1890 and 1910 it was already too late to emulate Brahms—let alone, as was more often the case, Liszt, Wagner, or even Beethoven. Moussorgsky, Strauss, and Debussy had already appeared on the horizon. The failure of Martucci, Sgambati, and their followers—a failure on the æsthetic plane, for their cultural merits can never be sufficiently recognized—lay in their diffidence towards any new form of expression, in their exclusive adoration of the great German nineteenth-century figures. The first advances towards modern symphonic composition in Italy were to be made under the aegis, not of Beethoven and Brahms, but of Strauss and Debussy. The former seemed to be textbook models, whereas the latter to Italian composers stood for independence and vitality. Even the choice of the models to be followed can sometimes aspire to originality.

But if the Martucci-Sgambati group failed in their efforts to draw Italian music out of its provincial isolation in opera and to bring it into the main stream of European art, another generation of musicians, born around 1880, was more successful. Of these the most important were Ottorino Respighi (b. 1876), Franco Alfano (b. 1876), Ildebrando Pizzetti (b. 1880), Gian Francesco Malipiero (b. 1882), and Alfredo Casella (b. 1883); and it is to them that Italy owes her musical renaissance to-day. In the face of unsympathetic conditions they fought heroically to establish their demands for a wider

and more modern culture, both musical and general, and in particular for the right to develop one's own artistic personality, whether great or small, in complete freedom and without opportunist concessions to public taste. This resulted in a breach with generally accepted opinion which has not yet been completely healed. But, side by side with the nineteenth-century operatic public, a public for concerts has grown up in the larger Italian towns which is gradually freeing itself from conservative and reactionary predilections and which will certainly become the natural arbiter of taste, capable of appreciating the new artistic manifestations of present-day Italian music, and generally extending its influence to wider and less exclusive circles.

This wider appeal is the more likely to prove effective inasmuch as in Italy modern music has not always presented itself in the guise of an aggressive or provocative reversal of accepted values. On the contrary, its exponents have spent much time and study in the search for a national classical tradition, going back beyond the nineteenth century, with which present manifestations can be linked up. In these researches they have shown especial leanings towards the great vocal and instrumental art of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, from Monteverdi to Vivaldi, from Frescobaldi to Scarlatti. Among the composers of this post-1880 generation, only Casella elected voluntarily to present his own works as something revolutionary (though Malipiero also unconsciously did the same). It was these two who encountered the fiercest battles and the most outspoken lack of understanding; whereas Alfano and Pizzetti merely had to put up with a respectful indifference. As for Ottorino Respighi, he was spared even the more negative forms of incomprehension by the public. He was the first Italian composer to abandon the old tradition of conventional opera who met with complete success in the field of symphonic music, and both in Italy and abroad he established the reputation of the new Italian school of music. Whatever views may be held to-day about his successful symphonic poems, his function as a 'fifth columnist' of modern music is now a historically established fact.

It is not possible within the compass of this article to attempt

a detailed appreciation of the different characteristics of these five founders of modern music in Italy; their works, moreover, are by now sufficiently familiar abroad. Suffice it to say that while Alfano and Respighi remained fairly close to the original models of the Italian musical renaissance—the French impressionists and the descriptive effects of Strauss's large-scale orchestration—Casella assumed the role of a Ulysses, and there was no experiment, in modern forms which his insatiable curiosity left untried. Pizzetti and Malipiero, on the other hand, were attracted, as was also Alfano, by opera, and carried reform into the enemy's stronghold of the theatre. They, too, were to some extent affected by certain aspects of modern European music, such as for example, Bloch, the Russians, and French impressionism. But they concentrated chiefly on the formation of a new national melodic language, detached from conventional formulæ, with its roots in the great sixteenth and seventeenth century vocal and instrumental tradition, and even going further back to the free modal sensibility of the Gregorian chant.

Malipiero once said that for Italians Gregorian music had assumed the same importance as the folksong for the Russians. This is a profound dictum, and one which touches on a fundamental trait in modern Italian music, in contrast to the folksong influence discernible in the music, of for example Bartok, Kodaly, De Falla, the early Stravinsky, and Vaughan Williams. The importance of national and folksong influences in modern music has been great among the nations with a young civilization, but less significant in the case of those with a long-standing musical tradition. In particular, it has been observed that musical nationalism has flourished especially in those countries which, in the Middle Ages, did not come under the influence of Gregorian music, or were influenced by it only slightly or at a later stage. It is obvious, therefore, that in a country with musical tradition such as Italy's the modern musical renaissance was unlikely to develop on a basis of folk-music, or to allow itself to be limited by the findings of ethnical research. Instead, it discovered its natural bent in reflecting a universal artistic civilization, founded on history rather than on nature. For Italian music the danger lies in complication

rather than in simplicity. It runs the risk of falling into an abstract and over-civilized mode of expression, verging at times on the pompous or academic, rather than of allowing itself to be confined within the narrow limits inseparable from simple and solid popular forms.

It was a formidable historical responsibility that weighed upon the shoulders of those five artificers of modern Italian music. Their labours must have been regarded as fruitless if their own personal artistic aspirations, maintained in the face of years of misunderstanding, had remained as purely isolated instances, and if they had not succeeded in laying the foundations of a new musical tradition. Apart from their own individual success on the artistic plane, they would have failed in the historic mission entrusted to them by circumstances if the grafting of Italian music on to the main trunk of European civilization had not borne fruit. Might it not be argued, in that case, that in rejecting the nineteenth century operatic tradition Italy had betrayed the fundamental *raison d'être* of her musical life?

To-day, when the issue is no longer in doubt and the battle can be said to be won, it may as well be confessed that for twenty or thirty years those of us who had the future of Italian music at heart lived in trepidation over this experiment. With mingled doubt and gratitude we followed the valiant uphill struggle of these five Italian pioneers. On them we had pinned all our faith in some sort of artistic and moral values, in them lay all our hopes that Italy might succeed in winning a position worthy of herself in the sphere of modern music. Sometimes, inevitably, we were assailed by doubts. True, our team was carrying out to perfection its task of importing into Italy the most varied and daring experiments of contemporary music and making them our own; they were modernizing and giving a European tone to our musical life; but were they in a position to give back to European music something in exchange for what they were receiving? Were they themselves producing something that had a universal value beyond the limits of our own national renaissance? In the international musical arena we saw ourselves being perpetually welcomed with the humiliating benevolence reserved for pleasant and promising

candidates of the 'also-ran' category. And at home we ourselves—why not confess it?—awaited the latest works of Stravinsky or Hindemith, even of Prokoviev, or Honegger, or Milhaud, with greater interest than those of Casella or Pizzetti or Malipiero.

The real question was, would our Italian composers have the power to become masters in the deepest and fullest sense of the word? And what about the second line of reserves?

With the second generation of modern Italian composers, the generation to whose formation the men of the 1880's had directly contributed, musical development came to a temporary standstill. This was due to a sort of timidity and lack of faith in themselves and in their method of expression; it showed itself in an invincible, almost provincial, desire to retire discreetly into the half-light, or into the shadow of Pizzetti, Respighi, Casella, and Malipiero, prudently eschewing any exaggerated or 'advanced' manifestations. Among the many followers of Pizzetti none approached the moral stature of the master. Of the young composers who emulate the standards of orchestral ingenuity set up by Respighi and Casella, which could hope to equal them in sureness of craftsmanship? (As for Malipiero, he always belonged to the category of inimitable artists.) On the other hand, from abroad, and especially from France, we were constantly hearing reports (doubtless inflated with a good dose of propaganda) of one new musical departure after another. Eighteen-year-old prodigies were said to be making their debuts with works which, though perhaps lacking in depth, were remarkable for their perfect mastery of contrapuntal and orchestral technique. And what about us? Had we in Italy really conquered new ground, or had the pioneers of the '80s merely carried out an ephemeral reconnaissance into the promised land of modern music?

These questionings must be borne in mind in order to appreciate the significance, in the last two or three decades, not only of the latest works of Pizzetti, Casella, and Malipiero, but also of two new young composers who have made their appearance—Petrassi and Dallapiccola. These two have not had to go through a hard international novitiate to reach the level of modern European standards, for this terrain had

already been won by the men of the '80s. Their art was born European, knowing no provincial limitations, and to them it came naturally to make use of the modern technique that had already become an assimilated part of the surroundings in which they grew up. Every initial disadvantage has now been done away with, and Italian composers can start at the same level as those of other countries. Italian music has already begun to repay what it borrowed from the common European tradition. Without a shadow of national pride, and remaining firm in our participation in modern European civilization as a whole, we can nevertheless affirm that to-day we look forward to the first performance of a new Italian work with the same interest with which we continue to welcome the productions of the greatest foreign composers.

It was a difficult venture on which Sgambati and Martucci embarked—nothing less than the abandonment of a glorious but outworn national tradition in favour of direct participation in European civilization; but the venture has succeeded.

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CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN THOUGHT

UGO SPIRITO

(Translated by Muriel Currey)

To understand the present state of philosophic thought in Italy it is essential to take into account the predominant place held by idealism during the early years of the century. Positivism which had spread so rapidly during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and had exercised an overwhelming influence in culture and art, had not been able to withstand the criticism of the protagonists of idealism and had almost entirely disappeared. In this new spiritual atmosphere relativism and irrationalism, so widely diffused in Europe and America, shared the fate of positivism. Voluntarism, intuitionism, and pragmatism from Nietzsche and Bergson to James had their followers in Italy, but they were quickly submerged by the rising tide of idealism. This system of philosophy made its first appearance in the pages of the review *La Critica* at the beginning of the twentieth century. Such were the energy and polemical ability of its protagonists that it exercised the most profound influence not only on all students of philosophy but also on writers, artists, historians, and teachers, and even on economists, jurists, and scientists.

Idealism was the intellectual heir of the Hegelian tradition which was still alive in Italy, particularly in the work of Spaventa. The new philosophy permeated the thought of Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce, the latter, who was an older man and already well-known in the fields of history and literature, followed the example of his friend in embarking on the study of German philosophy. With their wide knowledge of history and their command of logic and dialectics the two thinkers succeeded, in the course of a few years, in virtually annihilating their opponents and becoming the acknowledged leaders of the new school. Young men were attracted by the new doctrine and became enthusiastic,

almost fanatical adherents. They were inspired by the conception of a creative and revivifying spiritual force which was to find its outlet in action and constructive effort, a force sufficiently powerful to overcome every obstacle. There followed a reawakening of national pride, of the ability to express it both in thought and action, and an awareness of a tradition inherited from humanism and the Renaissance.

As a result the habit of accepting alien schools of thought came to an end, but there was no narrow and exclusive nationalism. The desire was to raise Italian culture to the European level while maintaining its Italian character and tradition, to emphasize the originality of its contribution, and to promote a more adequate recognition of its historic place in the realm of thought.

This spiritual content of the philosophy of idealism was clearly to be seen before the First World War, and became still more accentuated during and after that War, particularly in the work of Giovanni Gentile. His philosophy became known as 'actualism', and is based on the principle of an absolute *act* in which all reality finds expression, and reveals itself in its spiritual character. Transcendentalism is eliminated, mankind becomes aware of an infinite liberty and perceives the need to live and act in the realization of the liberty. This became in Gentile the basis of a new school of thought, and through his teaching the means of spreading the knowledge of the new philosophy. As a result the politicians realized the need for the reform of the educational system, and Croce himself became the Minister of Education after the First World War and drafted the first programme for reform.

The new philosophy provided a new conception of education and found expression in the schools both theoretically and politically. It is not therefore surprising that many of the essential principles of Fascism are to be found in Italian idealism. Anyone who reads *Pagine sulla Guerra*, written during and after the First World War, will find in that book the most severe criticism of democratic ideology, and the statement of a theory of the place of force in politics, which rests on an historical tradition stretching from Macchiavelli to Vico and finally to Treitzschke. It was the final expression of Italian

idealism and the last blow to the illuminatistic-positivist tradition against which it asserted the rights of an historical conception of reality.

But with the coming of Fascism the decline of the Italian philosophy of idealism began, and one saw even among its most ardent supporters, the first criticisms, the first signs of hesitation, of discomfort, of doubt and of an approaching crisis. Catholic thought had passed through the crisis of modernism at the end of the last century and the beginning of this, and had then sought to renew itself through the neo-scholastic movement. This was originated and directed by Padre Agostino Gemelli, and as it emerged from the subservience to which it had been reduced by idealism it made its voice heard more decisively.

The concordat between the Church and State in 1929 and the introduction of religious teaching in the schools contributed to a reawakening—at least in its practical aspect—of interest in religion. This increased in strength as the crisis in idealism became more acute and some of its adherents returned to the traditional faith.

The passing of the philosophy of idealism which had already begun, gathered momentum during the Second World War and with the disappearance of Fascism. If one now surveys the horizon—as was done at the International Congress on Philosophy held in Rome in 1946, and at the XV National Congress held this year at Messina—it must be recognized that the sun of the idealistic conception is rapidly setting and that few thinkers now even trouble to subject it to serious criticism.

But what current of thought will take its place? To give a satisfactory answer to this question it is necessary to consider the relationship between Italian and European thought or rather Western thought, in general. Idealism, as it has been seen, weakened this relationship with its radical refusal to accept relativism and irrationalism. The crisis in idealism has caused renewed interest in the currents of thought north of the Alps, and relativism and irrationalism have been rapidly gaining ground. The more so that the atmosphere of crisis is no longer that of a single current of thought but

involves to a certain extent the whole of Western civilization and the culture of this post-war period. The philosophy of the crisis therefore to-day dominates Italian thought and is progressively undermining the metaphysical conceptions of the last decades. There are still, it is true, representatives of the different currents of thought from idealism to neo-scholasticism, from existentialism to neo-positivism and the philosophy of science, from historicism to materialism, from voluntarism to æstheticism, but all reveal a diminishing metaphysical content and remain on a cultural rather than a philosophical plane, an aspiration rather than a faith.

Many thinkers realize clearly the dangers and the urgent and undeniable need of the present situation, but they have not the ability to evolve a new philosophy. If relativism is now in the ascendant, the idealistic movement has left a deep impression on Italian thought and is still an obstacle to the unquestioning acceptance of the simple and crude tenets of relativism. Minds educated in a subtle dialectical system of logic, cannot but perceive the dogmatism implicit in relativism and the intellectualism which is inherent in the much vaunted irrationalism. The failure of positivist metaphysics does not therefore lead to a renunciation of metaphysics, but to an attitude of unprejudiced research in every direction whether rational or irrational, philosophic or scientific, theoretical or practical, æsthetic or religious, individualistic or social, in a multifarious experience gained from contemporary life in all its aspects. In this lies the hope of discovering the basic concepts of the future. In this sense Italian thought has carried criticism to its uttermost limits and presses forward in complete freedom. The most representative current of thought has adopted the title of 'problematicism' and is gaining ground. It has spread beyond the field of philosophy and is becoming a common attitude of mind in the worlds of culture and art.

It is a period of crisis but also of hope and is therefore rich in the most varied forms of expression, effort, initiative, co-operation, the interchange of spiritual experience, by which all culture is enriched and transformed, while awaiting the illumination so ardently desired.

THE SICK MONKEY

EMILIO CECCHI

(*Translated by Bernard Wall*)

EVEN the Zoological gardens had felt the war; and things looked more fanciful from weather and neglect. The vivid leafiness of the trees and the crisscross of sun and shadow framed their apparent incongruity as though for the background of a decorative composition. African huts with conical roofs of stubble, mouldy larkspur of wattle walls with vaguely Assyrian-looking reliefs, side by side with the rocky precipices and deserted steps of an artificial polar icefloe. With its horns entangled at the architrave, a great acacia-coloured antelope peered out, dazzled at the sun, between the red pillars of a Buddhist kiosk.

With the invasion of weeds and the cracking of the asphalt, which was apparently reverting to its condition of natural stone, the surviving animals managed more easily to play their natural rôles. Were it not that from the aviaries and cages there came lowered howls, snarls, and whines, at times the garden would have appeared deserted. Noticeable, in comparison with other visitors, was the number of priests and friars going around the garden: couples of young franciscans, talkative and happy, fluttering in their habits, shambling in their sandals. And black priests, some with purple stocks, their severe faces buttoned up by the black buttons of their eyes. In the midst of the survivals of a Nature unredeemed and without desire of redemption, in the midst of the yelping and roaring and blowing all around them, they seemed to have been summoned together for a theological inspection, their fingers marking their breviaries, in a kind of devastated earthly paradise.

Animals surviving the frosts and the malnutrition of the winters of war were generally the smallest and most insignificant. So it happens that the shapeless jetsam of existence, in times of cataclysm and epidemic, succeeds anonymously in

evading the snares and meshes of death. These animals had been installed as well as possible in provisional dwellings which once housed guests far rarer and prouder. Above these dwellings, as crown of birth or coat of arms, the noblest titles of the zoological aristocracy stood out clearly on the enamel notices. In the doorway one expected to see the pompous leopard, the necromantic Javanésé panther with the train of its tail dragging softly behind it. And instead, after a long wait, looking abashed and out of sorts, a half-mangy fox cub appeared, as though emerging from the pages of *Pinocchio*.

How true my impression is I do not know. But it seems to me that if we look long enough at a lion we always end up by superimposing a classical formalism on the living image. At least thirty centuries of statuary have inevitably taught us to see the lion in his academic edition. And whether he be sleepily enthroned like a patriarch among his wives, or in the act of plunging with a roar against enemies a hundred times more powerful than he is, he always makes us think of the pedestal of a monument and the groupings of patriotic sculpture. The expression in his hypnotic eye is so human that it is often compared with the glance of that most human of all heroes of history, Garibaldi. He is called the King of the animals; perhaps because in some measure he has obtained a place outside their ranks through keeping the exclusive company of gods, evangelists, and great leaders of men.

I was thinking these things as I left the brazen lions and approached a tumbling pile of artificial crags separated from the green stage level of the lawns by a hidden and impassable moat. The sun had already gone down behind the crest of the rocks and the chalky amphitheatre was filled with a cold and bluish light. There the most splendid monster of all creation turned on her paces in slow measure. There the queen or rather empress of a whole realm or empire was in truth reigning—an empire as impenetrable for us as the kingdom of the stars or of death.

There was something symbolic in the sense of solitude the immense tigress diffused around her and in her apparent liberty and monotonous turning. And her appearance, her

sleek presence, were symbolic too; the sinuous excellence of form that hides some slight element of angularity that is disproportionate and degenerate; the contrast of the grotesque and the tragic, of majesty and bewitchment, in the bearded face, striped in black, light, and yellow like a barbarian mask for the rites of moon-worshippers, a jewelled escutcheon or feathery trophy for cannibals. On the chine of the golden body the black stripes of her macabre harlequin's fancy-dress limned the skeleton in all its horror; the knots in the spine, the hull of the ribs, the thigh-bones and tibias of the frame of the dead. There was something phosphorescent about the whiteness of the belly. It must be admitted that Nature could hardly have done better had she wished to provide a fearful emblem of her beauty and malignity.

Up and down ranged the tigress, disappearing and appearing again as though extraneous to all things, on the bastions of her heraldic world, held in an icy silence. But when from behind my shoulders she heard what seemed a child's cough she stopped in her traces, intent in expectation, poised on her forepaws, ready to leap. And this seemed unworthy of her, like an unforeseen fall back into her raw materiality. So I turned too; and in a cage I had not even noticed there was a small coughing monkey. A little monkey the colour of a turtle dove with a face like a dark little Moorish girl, with shining feverish eyes under worried eyebrows.

It shivered and coughed in fascination and terror, unable to turn its glance away from the great black-and-gold idol. In the twilight of instinct perhaps it seemed an objectivized image of the death creeping within, a funereal apparition of its forest mythologies. It was the visitation of the demon presiding over its life in the beyond, coming to ask for the soul of the phthisical doll-like creature. It coughed and barked, never taking its eyes from the beast of prey fixing it: until it gathered itself up and as though in a dream passed a hand over its forehead slowly.

And then it let out an interminable cry, ever so sharp, a shriek of frightful hysteria and agony that almost turned the leaves on the branches cold with fear. A cry of supernatural despair, of absolute death, the piercing voice of a creature

hurled through space into blind emptiness. After which, panting a little, it settled again like the sick man who is resigned once more and folds his hands on the sheets. It half-closed its eyes with its wrinkled and transparent lids, for all the world like a little old woman who prays in the cold: and when I looked towards the rocks the tiger, too, had squatted down and was yawning in all indifference.

EMILIO CECCHI was born in Florence in 1884. He is one of the best known of living Italian writers, and is a great authority on English and American literature. His works include essays, literary criticism and travel books. Amongst his essays is the famous and now classical *Pesci Rossi*. Literary criticism by Cecchi covers a wide field and includes: *Scrittori Inglesi ed Americani*, *Trecentisti senesi*, and *Giotto*. His travel books include observations on American and Mexican life.

CORRADO ALVARO was born in Calabria in 1889. He is a novelist, journalist, and dramatist. His works include *L'Uomo nel Labirinto*, *Gente in Aspromonte*, and *L'Uomo è forte*. He usually writes about the poor people of his native South Italy. *L'Uomo è forte*, which is a psychological thriller of an imaginary totalitarian state, has recently been translated into English as *Man is Strong*.

DELICATE

CORRADO ALVARO

(Translated by Bernard Wall)

IT was just the other day that the young lad came home on leave. He was in uniform and was at the war somewhere. At home everything was in readiness. There were tins of food and bars of chocolate—stores that had been put aside two years before in expectation of war. Some of the names printed on the tins were of cities now threatened, besieged, bombarded, or destroyed. Names whose prestige had gone. The young lad's father had fought in the last war twenty years ago at a time when those cities still meant something and evoked memories of history lessons at school. There was the fame of their cathedrals and palaces, their ancient industries, their merchants and explorers, their landscapes and customs, surviving in the paintings of the old masters; there was the fame of their way of thinking, surviving in the writings of the great poets. In those days the enemy, on entering ancient cities, wept at the thought of Rembrandt or Giorgione or Joan of Arc—the makers of civilization. Now there was no weeping. It was as though a dying person had had a relapse. Cities fell as though history had come to an end. Paris collapsed in the middle of a radio-transmission of prayers and litanies which faded away with no announcer's 'good night'. There was a tin of *pâté de foie gras* from Strasburg; the word 'Strasburg' no longer suggested a cathedral, but the tin that had survived. That was what Europe was—a shop for delicate objects that had had a direct hit.

This boy in uniform needed a good feed. His parents tried to drive away their remorse by feeding him up. Remorse lay deep down in their hearts. They plied him with food and yet he persisted in looking cheated, abandoned, an outcast. He told a tale of how on his way home with his battered uniform and forlorn appearance he had been stopped by the police

and told not to go through the main streets but to creep through the byways. Public morale should not be lowered. In the other war a soldier passing by in a tattered uniform aroused the same feelings as a tattered flag. Now, however, it was merely upsetting.

The young fellow looked around and his eyes, seeking moral support, found spaghetti, tinned food, and chocolate. Soon nothing would be left of Strasburg and Hamburg save empty tins of *pâté* or fish and onions. When they kissed him on the cheek his father and mother could feel their son's manly growth and hard manly skin. To him their cheeks felt soft. The father had wiped away a tear. It rose on his eyelash and grew cold as though he were weeping tears of ice. Since their son's departure they had stopped eating in the dining-room and confined themselves to the kitchen hearth. And similarly now their thoughts were absorbed in keeping life going. They had nothing to say, not even 'good luck'. They could only give him food and a comfortable bed. When the boy ate he tasted the old world, now over and done with; and the first night he failed to sleep because the bed was too soft.

The fact was they looked on him as one looks on a defeated man and thought of him as one thinks of a conquered people. Though this was their son, they even wanted his defeat, and meanwhile they gave him food. He tried to tell them some anecdote, but it wasn't of any interest. Sympathy for the beaten is only painful. For one moment the father, who knew what war was, could imagine the scene his son had to face when he first joined the regiment. The burial of six other fellows killed in an ambush—he remembered how stiff dead soldiers are under their greatcoats. And how cold a rifle barrel is when you present arms for the dead. But it was as if it all had happened to someone else. Father and mother were both thinking the same as they looked at him, his heart, his limbs. For the first time they felt they couldn't help him.

It was a wretched army of cheated and abandoned sons. An army of remorse. And so none of them talked willingly. The boy felt uneasy at home and looked forward to getting back among his fellows, warming himself with them in the gloom of abandonment and rancour. Everything in his room was

as he had left it but he didn't notice that his writing-paper, pen, and pen-knife were exactly where he had put them before leaving. It made no difference whether they forgot about him or thought about him, because anyway they couldn't think of all his companions. They hoped *he* would pull through, not that all would. He tried to tell them about the rivers he had seen in the war, clear streams in the mountains with names belonging to another epoch of history. 'Oh, quite.' Then he talked of his job. He hoped to get exempted from it and go back and rejoin the others. Fighting was less boring. His job meant spending the whole day going up and down a section of railway line, standing on the engine, eyes on the rails, the sleepers, the cuttings, and the track. You needed an experienced eye to discover if the line was mined. You might be blown up by one of those mines. You might be attacked and killed. 'Oh, quite.' These descriptions failed to arouse emotion or anxiety. There wasn't a tear or a heartbeat for this young man who was their son. The stories only emphasized the feeling of remorse. It wasn't enough just to prepare the soft bed and ply him with food. His father and mother had something to blame themselves for and it wasn't quite clear what. They blamed themselves for not stopping the war. 'But how could I, I alone, stop the war?' Thus the woman blamed the man and the man's cowardice. 'And what about women? Don't they share responsibility for making us cowards?' After that they made it up and started congratulating each other. They boasted of their boy's intelligence. They boasted of his health. That was the only kind of benefit they had been able to bestow.

This happened while the boy was out—in his uniform now mended and ironed by his mother. But when he returned wearing the uniform which in their imagination they associated with defeat—a defeat they even longed for—they re-discovered themselves in those eyes that judged them, that didn't understand, that found help nowhere. From what he said it was clear that there were others with whom there had grown a bond stronger than that of family—as happens with outcasts and vagabonds. His real family was elsewhere. Here in his old and faded family, carefully keeping

its house in order as if a single bomb couldn't reduce it to powder, remorse lay brooding: remorse for having brought him into the world and being unable to defend him. His very eyes seemed to say: 'You've been unable to save me from the war.' Cities collapsed in dust, cathedrals and palaces were destroyed, whole populations, once proud of their culture, were routed, and even those who had thought they knew everything—scientists, philosophers and poets—fled with the herd, in their pockets a scrap of paper with a few foreign words craving the enemy's indulgence. But this young man had no pangs of remorse, he had no need of anyone's indulgence. There were fine rivers in the mountains. The captain slept with the wife of the village notable. Once, when they were starving in a wood, they found that donkey meat tasted delicious. A girl was crossing the wood. She was a spy. A lovely girl. Had she been shot? When his parents asked this he fell silent as though they had been trying to uncover a tale of love.

The mother turned on the radio—it was the *Voce di Londra* itself. There sat the boy in his uniform. The uniform was threadbare, like a peasant's coat. The radio was talking Italian but the boy jumped and said: 'What's this?' He spoke with a gesture new to his father, that of a man who has learnt to command. The radio voice had a special cadence, like that of a schoolboy who has learnt by heart how to pronounce his own language from the mouth of a foreigner. Even what it said was foreign for it talked of death and defeat; and the death and defeat it talked about were of people like this young man, his numberless comrades, him himself. 'What is this?' The boy's face broke into a deep frown, and his father and mother got a glimmering of his look when he faced the beautiful spy. These were his features when he confronted the enemy. His father felt as if he had been struck. 'Turn it off,' he said to his wife. 'Why?' she asked.

'Can't you understand? Here's someone at war. That someone is your son. And to-morrow the radio voice may tell of his ruin.'

But even so she didn't understand.

'Can't you see that this voice offends and insults him?'

'But it's how we know what's happening.'

The father became exasperated. 'He mustn't know what's happening. He has to face it.'

'But it isn't as though we didn't listen on other days,' the mother said.

The boy got up and went out. He banged the door hard. Once again there was the impression of a blow. The voice on the radio ran on.

'Can't you see that we mustn't tell the boy we know we'll be beaten and we want to be? He's got to fight. At least he must have the strength to defend his own life.'

The voice went on and on in its preacher's tone. Every now and then you felt you could see the face of the hidden, safe man who was talking.

'Turn it down.'

The voice went on. It was murmuring now. As if relishing a vengeance against all men, the mother said loudly: 'They've destroyed . . .'

The man shut himself in his room. He would await the boy's return and invite him to a man-to-man talk. He didn't know what he would say. Perhaps he would kneel down and ask his forgiveness.

Instead they met round the dinner table. They had nothing to say to each other. The boy was thinking that to-morrow he would be off. He was glad. Without his companions he felt like a tourist visiting the town. The palaces and churches he had walked past as a schoolboy and then as a student and then when in love looked like something in an illustrated magazine. His departure was according to plan; he went well provided for the journey. Even his father and mother thought it a good thing he was going and almost wanted it. He was the son for whom they spent sleepless nights, whose news they awaited day after day, hardly able to fill the gap between the day he left and the day the green field-envelopes arrived. He was their sorrow, the best thing in their life now. They returned to the kitchen for their meals. They took up their conversations about his boyhood. They congratulated each other on having brought him up strong. And thus they felt less remorse.

THE CASTLE OF MIRAMONT

CARLO LEVI

(*Translated by Bernard Wall*)

WHEN we reached the clearing in front of the castle of Miramont we espied four big French army trucks, almost new and in excellent condition, just a bit dusty. Spread out over the radiators or hanging from cords were shirts and underclothes, flapping lazily in the wind beneath the summer sky. And stretched out on the ground were soldiers sunning themselves. In our pockets lay the keys to this castle—one among the thousand-odd scattered over the French countryside, a small and elegant eighteenth century edifice that belonged to an Italian friend of ours. But we had evidently arrived a few hours too late. All the rooms had been taken over by a company of fugitive troops who had landed up here by chance after four days of continuous flight from the Somme front. Eighty young Bretons they were, with the square faces of peasants and fishermen and strong heavy bodies. There was no question of our living in the castle: we had to content ourselves with seeking hospitality from the villagers—a possibility we had actually foreseen.

It was a late afternoon at the end of June, 1940. My companion and I had set out hurriedly from Arcachon which the victorious German troops were expected to enter the next morning. My companion was a distinguished law professor. He had arrived at my door in a taxi, procured by some miracle, and invited me to jump in and leave with him before the Nazis arrived. There was no alternative. The confusion of those days made the possibility of a chance embarkation for England very slight. We went in the taxi to the Commissariat. In spite of the disorder and defeat, the millions of men shoving along the roads in all directions, and the collapse of authority, State machinery still operated for the bureaucratic watch on foreigners and the prohibition on moving without a permit. But the Commissaire of Arcachon was that rare

thing, a friend, a left-winger, and furthermore a man of good sense. And he made no delay about writing out our permits to go to the castle of Miramont—the justification, on that catastrophic day, was of all things ‘urgent agricultural affairs’. It was a permit to go there and back. We have never made use of the return permit.

So we set out in our taxi all in order, leaving behind us the nineteenth-century city of Arcachon, its *place*, its cafés, its oysters, its sand dunes, its memories of D’Annunzio, and its remnants of hope that stay stubbornly in men’s hearts up to the very end.

The streets were almost empty. The great rout was over. Traces of it still remained on either side. We kept coming across abandoned cars turned upside down in the ditches. Here and there were groups of refugees dragging along improbable household goods in prams and home-made trucks. At one point we noticed a hearse, black on the white roadway, carrying women, children, mattresses, pans and toys, on its way from Belgium. But after the surging masses of the preceding days these belated fugitives failed to disturb the peace of the landscape, the silence of the deserted houses and the summer sun on the undulating fields. Now and again, in this silence and absurd peace, blond soldiers on black motorcycles flashed past us, clad in black from gloves to boots—fleeting apparitions from hell. They whirled past alone, isolated, never stopping. I don’t think they were armed. They were the black heralds of Hitler’s armies speeding, unresisted, hundreds of kilometres ahead of the troops. Even their appearance caused a shudder of mythological terror.

As luck would have it the castle of Miramont, near Marmande in the Lot and Garonne, turned out to be in the unoccupied zone, a few kilometres on this side of the demarcation line. We had no means of leaving. We had to remain as guests of the local peasants for some twenty days. The day after our arrival we were joined by another friend who had bicycled from Bordeaux—a young scientist who spent some days with us and then went off again on his bicycle and managed to get aboard a ship. I believe later he helped in making the atomic bomb. Our peasant-hosts were Italians.

Nearly all the country people of that region come from the Veneto and usually from one particular town, Salice. Indeed, Nature and artifice have given the region a certain resemblance to the Veneto. There are the same trees and the same green, damp, undulating landscape. Fleeing soldiers kept knocking at the peasants' doors. They were hungry and thirsty; above all they wanted to drink, rest, and celebrate the end of the war. The French peasants kept their doors shut and barricaded so as to defend their own booty from these marauders. The peasants from Salice opened theirs. It didn't matter if this year's wine was poured out to the last glass. 'Poor fellows.'

Compared with the French, the Italians seemed extraordinarily generous. Their country-diffidence prevented them talking much, but what they let us know of their mind was reassuring. They said: 'We're only just beginning the war. It won't always be like this.' Whereas for the French soldiers the war was over: no matter how, they would get back home. Meanwhile, still stupefied by flight, they passed the first days of their holiday playing *palais*. This is a sort of quoits played with iron disks with holes in them. I got them to teach me and sometimes I played with them. Every second day they killed a calf in front of the castle. They had in their company two Breton butchers. They stuck four stakes in the ground to which they tied the animal's hooves—it was of a tender age, white, with short horns. They cut its throat with a long sharp knife and on the instant its knees sagged. A few yards from the exit of the improvised kitchen they had installed a radio. The senile appeals of Pétain mingled with the bellowing of the calf. One day when, as usual, I was fascinatedly watching the throat-cutting, I heard a new and different voice coming out of the radio. 'It is I, I, who speak to you. *C'est MOI le général de Gaulle qui vous parle.*' Who on earth? The soldiers looked at one another dismayed by that new voice—all so unfamiliar and ridiculous. They listened intently. The voice said:

'France cannot die. The war is not lost. You must carry on and win it.'

These words seemed like blasphemy to the little group

playing *palais*, the Breton fishermen, the sergeants, the rankers who were tired and ashamed.

'*Salaud. Tas de fumier*,' shouted the soldiers, furious, against the radio. 'He wants us to go on with the war. Let him go on. We're going home.'

That was the welcome the castle of Miramont gave to the first *appel*. A week later everything had changed. '*On a été trahi*,' said the soldiers. 'We've been betrayed.' The pleasure at the war being over was in its turn over. Here and there a doubt was born, perhaps a hope.

The meadow in front of the castle was full of tall grass and flowers. The scientist, the lawyer, and I lay in the grass, outstretched in the July sun, enjoying the material warmth with the sort of physical happiness which is strong when life itself is uncertain.

CARLO LEVI was born in Turin in 1902. He is a painter and he has also qualified as a doctor. He was arrested by the Fascist Government for his hostility to the régime and sent *in confino*—i.e. forced residence within a limited area—to Southern Italy. This imprisonment gave him an opportunity to study the customs of the inhabitants of the remote parts of Lucania and his description of his impressions—*Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*—has had a greater success than that of any other book in post-war Italy. It was translated into English as *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. He has exhibited as a painter with other Italian artists in London since the war. He is also the author of *Paura della libertà*.

THE MASTINÙ FAMILY or DEATH KILLS BOREDOM

ALBERTO SAVINIO

(Translated by Bernard Wall)

IT was early morning and, as usual, I was writing at my desk. Suddenly a little disk of light fell on the flap of my desk and began to dance. I lifted my eyes and was dazzled.

It is a game that has been going on for years, on the mornings of sunny days. The reason why the disk of light dances on my writing desk only on sunny days is that it is only on sunny days that the mirror game can be played. And if the disk dances only in the morning it is because only in the morning does the sun fall on the terrace; and it is on the terrace that the individual who plays the mirror game is always to be found.

The player in the sun-and-mirror game is a boy of about seventeen. Though the slant of his body could not be called horizontal it is nevertheless slightly oblique, as though he had failed to acquire the habit of being vertical and tended to return to the stance of the four-legged animal. His chin is heavy and shoe-shaped. His hair stiff and almost meeting his eyebrows. His pupils are in constant and suspicious movement from right to left, from left to right, like little black pendulums.

It isn't only in the morning that this young fellow, half man and half primarian, is on the terrace; he is there all day. In the afternoon, when there is no sun to tilt brightly from his pocket mirror into the eyes of his neighbours opposite, he finds other pastimes. He follows the flight of birds with a familiar eye and beckons to them confidently. He watches the clouds as if he would like to board them and sail through the heavens. He shouts to passing people, making them lift bewildered eyes, try to understand, and then press on, hurrying their pace. He sings, dances, and laughs. But most of all he

stands straddle-legged with his hands resting on the parapet, continuously shaking his head as bears do.

One day I was with Enrico Fulchignoni. Together we watched the mirror-player on the terrace. Fulchignoni said: 'He's got water on the brain.'

That is the external portion of the Mastinù family. The other part is never visible but I know about it all the same. A 'cook-general' who for a while did for the Mastinùs, now works for us.

The Mastinù family is composed of the father, cavaliere Arturo Mastinù, aged sixty and chief cashier at a ministry; of the mother, Santa Biancareddu in Mastinù, aged forty-two; of the daughter Agnesina, aged twenty-seven, and employed in a firm for household utensils; and of Michelino the son, our encephalitic. There used to be the grandmother (Arturo Mastinù's mother, aged eighty) but she died a fortnight ago.

The Mastinù's house is full of clocks. Of every kind and size. With pendulums and with springs, portable or pocket, turnip or grandfather. The monstrous and varied tickings of their metal hearts echo night and day. In the Mastinù household they are the only sign of life.

There is no understanding the presence of so many machines for measuring time in a house where time has lost all value. For in the Mastinùs' house nothing happens.

Or nothing *had* happened.

Cavaliere Mastinù left home in the morning and came back at one; he lunched with the family on soup, meat, and two veg., half an orange in winter and half some other fruit in other seasons. He went out again, returned once more at seven, supped on coffee and stale bread, and went to bed. Mrs. Mastinù went out in the morning for the shopping, came back to cook, got everybody's coffee ready in the evening and between meals mended shirts and socks. Agnesina's office hours were like her father's. Michelino spent the day on the terrace, summoning passing birds, dazzling the sun into the eyes of the people opposite and swinging his head like a bear.

And so it went on for years.

The various members of the Mastinù family had lost the

habit of thinking, or perhaps they had never had it. They had lost the habit of talking too—a thing they certainly must have had once, for man is a talking animal. They no longer greeted one another. They didn't even look at one another. What was the point of talking, greeting, and looking? They lived a dead life in the middle of the life counted off by ten busy clocks. The liveliest was Michelino with his water on the brain. Michelino was himself as punctual as a clock and sounded the change of the clocks in the house.

The frightful happenings of recent years didn't even graze the Mastinù family. They simply didn't take in the war. When the first air-raid sirens went the Mastinù family, headed by the grandmother, filed down to the cellar with the other occupants of the block, and in the shelter Michelino kept everyone cheerful including those whose bowels gave way. Then, bit by bit, when it became clear that raids on Rome were bloodless, the Mastinù family's descents to the cellar became rarer, and finally they took no more notice of the sirens, just as for years they were unused to noticing summonses or anything else.

The Germans descended on Italy and chased humans as the farmer's wife chases fowl in the barnyard; arrested them, deported them, used them for forced labour, killed them. But the two male Mastinùs went on living as though the situation were a perfectly peaceful and legal one. The Negroes came to Italy and bought women with the jingle of occupation currency, and the Moors raped them without financial reward. But the two female Mastinùs (I mean the mother and daughter, for the grandmother wasn't in a state to arouse the most excitable Moor) hadn't even the mildest invitation to say no to.

Slowly the Mastinù family went to shipwreck with boredom.

At mealtimes the grandmother served herself last. She pulled the soup tureen towards her, added breadcrumbs to what was left over, poured wine and milk in, mixed it all up into slops and shovelled it into her toothless mouth.

One day at the second spoonful she coughed and spat the whole lot out. She barked. She got up from table with her eyes half out of her head. She staggered out. There was a thud

in the passage. Michelino ran to look. He came back laughing and making an X with his arms and legs, imitating grandmother on the floor. 'A bearskin rug.

The grandmother had a long illness and life was changed in the Mastinù household. The house filled with people. Doctor Lefante came every day. Uncles and cousins, scattered for years, turned up once more. The neighbours began to visit the Mastinùs. One of the cavaliere's colleagues, junior to him, paid attentions to Agnesina and talked of marrying her. Mrs. Mastinù was taught the elements of bridge by a neighbour on the next floor. Mastinù became the lover of the nurse who came to look after the grandmother. Michelino skipped from room to room like a monkey.

The grandmother's death and funeral marked the pinnacle of liveliness in the Mastinù household. Relatives and friends stayed for lunch after the cemetery so as not to abandon the Mastinù family in its bereavement. There was a huge tableful of people, full of cheer. Michelino was like an ape taken into confidence by men and in gratitude went wild with joy.

The household accounts are kept by Mrs. Mastinù. The undertaker's representative brought the bill for carriage. On leaving he praised Mrs. Mastinù's figure and made an appointment with her for next day.

But next day the undertaker's representative didn't turn up at the appointment. Agnesina's swain came less and less and ended by dropping off altogether. The nurse found a more generous lover and left cavaliere Mastinù up the garden. Friends and relatives dispersed. The Mastinù family went back to its shipwreck of boredom.

Now they are back at table—all save the grandmother. They are eating with their faces in their soupbowls. But on the quiet they are watching one another, spying.

Michelino wags his head.

He stops. He lifts his head.

He speaks:

'When grandmother got ill and died everyone was cheerful. Now you are watching one another, waiting for someone else to die so that there'll be some more cheerfulness. Whose turn is it next?'

Michelino bursts into a huge laugh.

Father, mother and sister leap to their feet and look daggers at Michelino. But they don't breathe.

The voice of Michelino the water-brained boy is the voice of Truth.

‡

ALBERTO SAVINIO was born in Athens of Italian parents in 1891. His real name is Andrea de Chirico and he is the younger brother of Giorgio de Chiricò, the painter. He has written essays and stories, has composed dramas and music, and furthermore is a painter. The list of his writings is very long and includes: *La casa ispirata*, *Angelica o la notte di Maggio*, *Il Capitano Ulisse*, *La tragedia dell' infanzia*, *Achille innamorato*, *Dico a te Clio*, *Narrate Uomini la vostra Storia*, *Casa La Vita*, *Ascolto il tuo cuore città*, *Maupassant e l'alno*, *Sorte dell' Europa*, *Souvenirs*, *Introduction à une vie de Mercure*, *Tutta la vita*, and *Alcesis di Samuele*. As this list shows, his writings are on the most varied subjects and are in French as well as Italian.

MIRRORED IN A DREAM

GIANNA MANZINI

(Translated by Claudia Patrizi)

THE sky was orange-yellow as though the sun had overgrown maturity and were too old to set. It hung overhead inflated, ablaze, almost bursting the horizon. The horizon itself was part of the spectacle that took place in a wide open space unbounded by walls, houses, or streets. Indeed the only demarcations were the rows of chairs all occupied. My chair was at the end of a row and it stuck out as if it had been added as an afterthought. It broke the regularity of the large rectangle divided into parallel lines. I was uneasy about this and tried to draw closer to my neighbour. But she was unwilling to move and clung firmly and stubbornly to her chair with aggressive primness; indeed she seemed to grow heavier with the growing awareness of her rights; she glanced at me and her eyes were dark with contempt. Then, like all the others, she became lost in contemplation of the sky which now looked like the diaphanous pulp of an over-ripe fruit.

The heads and eyes of the onlookers never moved, but their words made a strange criss-cross as each looked through the mother-of-pearl opera-glasses that were being passed from hand to hand; they shone like tiny shuttles in the animated rectangle of audience, forming a brilliant network at eye-level.

'How terrible if the horizon were to stiffen.'

'Something should be done about it.'

'It's not our business. Those on the other side should see to it.'

'It's nothing to do with the sunset. They've turned the sky inside out, that's all.'

'It's an irruption from the other world.'

'Who's talking of revolution?'

'Great God! What a nerve-racking sight!'

'The mightiest that could be shown to the living.'

Any minute now someone might pass me the opera-glasses and then it would be my turn to comment. My lips were yearning for the explanation they would utter; certainly my phrase, like the bunch of coloured balloons clasped in my hand, would raise me up, almost make me fly. But it was impossible to make myself heard or have any authority, with my chair out of place, and I had made things worse by looking round imploringly. I was rapidly losing ground, yet my gaze became more entreating; I didn't care if they saw I was suffering, it was time they realized that desire and suffering have their own rights. I was nothing more now than the sorrowful prisoner of my unspoken words.

I besought my neighbour with silent prayer, pitting my eagerness against her cold aloofness. From that moment the tenseness of our gazes became the focus of silent and shocked interest and I alone was to blame. Why, I wondered; and so as to find out I wanted to look at myself in a mirror. But to my amazement I discovered that my hands were empty and my dress without pockets. Meanwhile the women around me were smiling at their own reflections in powder-compacts, watch-lids, handbag frames, buttons, and even in their polished finger-nails. I alone was unable to gain confidence from my own reflection. Then suddenly I was wakened by a suspicion that there was something wrong with me, that I was less real.

At that moment, some way away from the chairs, there appeared Giulia, a friend who had been dead for some time. She was beckoning me with large tragic gestures to go to her. But she was not so much bidding me join her as impressing on me that I should leave, that I shouldn't stay in that place with all the others. She was wrong; no one, in fact, wished to send me away; no one could.

And yet Giulia was becoming more alarmed; her sighs were choking her; she seemed to be bursting in an orgasm of grief. Somehow I had to reach her, and swiftly. I didn't walk; I glided. 'Good girl,' she said, pleased with me; but her patronizing tone offended me. She went on talking, rather as timid people talk to strangers or write to servants—with a mannered and misplaced simplicity, altogether absurd. Yet

she was so kind and touching that I could not help doing as she said and, so that she might lead me, I put my hand on hers as reverently and lightly as one takes holy water.

We passed by beautiful spectral cities revolving in a glowing transparency undimmed by distance. The contours of the porticos, the theatres, the churches, stood out against a sky that was almost-mauve; the whole scene was an architectural drawing. There in a square was a group of people. 'They are waiting for you,' Giulia said. I instantly recognized my mother, my uncle Armando, my grandmother and my little cousin Celia.

As usual my mother looked apprehensive. She was afraid that the others might break some necessary but painful news to me. She used to be like that when I was ill and people came to visit me, watching over the things that were said, testing them with her smile, searching them with her eyes.

'What is it?' I asked, suspicious of her loving concern.

Giulia said: 'Isn't it true that you feel well here already?'

My mother lowered her eyelids, discomfited, then imperceptibly shook her head to let Giulia see she had made a mistake.

And in fact, in spite of the benefits of a lightness which made me feel like a disembodied creature, cured, hardly more than a breath of air, I did still hunger for that feeling of substance, of satiety, which seemed to ensure for those whom I had left behind in the audience a permanent place.

In the centre of the square there was a ladder resting on nothing, and up and down it ran little Celia, her pale voile frock floating about her. It was the frock she had worn on one of her birthdays when I had given her a gold cross in a white cardboard box, wishing her a happy birthday with words I had learnt by heart. Now, if she had come down and stood in front of me, I should have had nothing to give her. She was swaying half-way up the ladder, tracing the letters of the alphabet on a frameless blackboard the size of a sheet of drawing paper and pale as aniseed water. The letters were vivid as though made with a burning finger. They were authoritative capitals, expressive and winking like an eye. The 'S' in particular was entrancing and I felt that between me

and this curling arabesque, suggestive of some playful trap, there was a sharp complicity.

But in such a limpid atmosphere it was inadvisable to rub the letters out, because dust was out of place. Indeed Celia didn't rub them out; she merely extinguished the whole of the alphabet, gently passing the edge of her hand in front of the board. I understood she was promising me an inexhaustible blank page on which I would be able to write indefinitely. An icy melancholy filled me like a huge clotted tear and drowned my soul. No hope nor resignation were left to me, only a smooth blind pain that tasted like marble. I was suddenly trapped without a chance of escape either by subterfuge, stolen privilege, or protest, and I found myself running in and out of porticos and churches which were only façades like stage-sets; in and out of palaces that gave no shelter and were full of large hollow-eyed masks standing against the light. Presently I realized that the whole of this architecture had been planned by myself, as a child, when playing with my wooden bricks after illnesses. I was still running wildly, always finding myself yet again in front of that blackboard.

Suddenly I saw in my uncle the man who might help me.

'Is she back?' I asked, so as to lean against his faith. (His wife had left him soon after their marriage and he had always awaited her return with an anguish that never effaced his absurd smile.)

'She's sure to come past here,' he answered.

I saw him leaning against the parapet of a bridge at the foot of a winged warrior. The statue was cast in his own image, but miraculously still. They were both extremely handsome, he and the tall effigy, pallid as the white of an eye just touched with light. It was clear, distinct, and victorious in every line; he was as sombre as his workaday suit, humble, his moustache more drooping than before, his cheeks leaner. From his hands, their palms open in a gesture of unending patience, the statue seemed to leap bravely upwards as though from a pedestal. He was resting on his tired legs, his knees, like those of a beggar, pressed together to prevent their trembling (while the statue was outstretched like a wing.) But he was gentle, so wasted and worn by ardent charity and

finally soothed by some inner truth of his own, the dazzling truth of forgiveness. Beside him, on the ledge, lay his dog, front paws folded under him like a siren or a lion. The man spoke to him caressingly, murmuring verses in his ear; the dog gave little signs of understanding, which were rather disturbing. My uncle said to reassure me:

'Didn't you realize that an animal will refrain from talking so as not to frighten you? This is something beyond our grasp and therefore not to be written about.'

'It is precisely those things that should be written about,' I objected.

He smiled, throwing his head back until it rested on the statue's feet as if on a soft cushion. But he was trembling with compassion because he, the man of hope, had come against something without remedy or salvation, hopeless, but alive and of the earth, wholly and uniquely of the earth: myself. I was humiliated and wanted to hide my face in my arm; but there was neither shelter nor shadow for me; both my face and my shame were exposed to the light.

Then my grandmother called to me. 'Come here,' she said.

I found it difficult to join her because I was trembling and because a group of people separated us. I had never noticed before that my grandmother was exactly like the Bramante dome at Pistoia. Why I had failed to see the resemblance in so many years I could not tell, but it struck me now that everyone but me had probably been aware of it. Her welcome was majestic and dignified, her figure rounded and full from neck to hem; she was the dome of my church; she remained still while people moved around her.

I approached her with delight and embarrassment and began playing with the little pendants hanging from a chain round her neck. It was merely a repetition of what had happened long ago. I as a child, in some public gardens, keeping close to her full black skirt trimmed with satin bands, used to finger these lucky charms hanging from her long necklace. Meanwhile she stood conversing with one or two friends, erect, motionless, solemn.

All of a sudden a new word fell from her lips: 'symmetries'. It rebounded right to my soul. I took it and held it; I tried

my voice at it. Then I smothered it within me. I swallowed it. At first it buzzed softly and then it unfolded like a butterfly on an open page. I felt exalted; the word was illuminating; it reflected the harmony of the garden around me. On account of that word, at once a gift and a victory, I felt more protected now by my grandmother's voice than before by her sheltering skirts. 'Beautiful symmetries,' she had said, and the word was enough to give the world its final significance under a blank sky. Symmetries.

Gratitude and a sense of complicity for the ancient gift of a word granted without anyone else knowing, and also for my grandmother's being one and the same as my church (where many years ago, I was told, a thief sought refuge and stayed for ever after so that no one could lay hands on him) awoke in my heart the desire to confide. I was almost smiling. 'Who knows how many words you have learned here?' I was beginning to feel happy. But she did not answer. She produced a series of small lorgnettes and began to use them alternately. She explained that they were made for various memories: short distance, long distance, larger, smaller. 'You must learn how to handle them by piercing time; they fix our memories better than the written page.'

The page again! I felt rebellious and had a wild desire to escape. I wanted to rush into my mother's arms. But hers was an inward love and did not express itself by word or look. Perhaps it was a timid kind of love.

We walked away. She took me to where there was a quantity of stationary horses—a forest of them. They were bathed in a pain that seemed to me to be intelligence, for their sweat was brilliant and alive as though the mercury of numberless thermometers had been spilt over them. They kept the distance from each other of the carriage to which they had been harnessed, and each seemed still bowed down by its weight. Almost chestless, and without manes, they seemed to enjoy the monotonous thud of their hoofs which fell like dead weights on a block of silence. And in their faces consumed with patience, and in the speaking different expression of each, I seemed to see the signs and portents of a new alphabet by which to read my fate.

My mother said: 'I have tried so often to warn you. I waited for you in the Piazza Santa Trinità at dusk. I took the place of a woman who sold notepaper. You always need it, and it cost almost nothing. Yet you never stopped.'

I started to cry and to remember—violently: the square with the obelisk in the middle and the carriages stationed round it. On the pavement a woman in a dark dress with black hat and gloves, proffering timorously, silently, her envelopes—envelopes improbably large and streaked with all the shadows that bathed the piazza, emphasizing with their dangerous magnetic whiteness the suspect hour of transition. At any moment a flaming name, like an accusation, might have appeared on one of them: my name.

I was anxious, then, to pass at an equal distance from the horses, intolerable symbols of exhausted resignation, and from that woman who, having groomed and composed her poverty, seemed to praise needlework and to rebuke me for the way I was playing my little game in the world.

'My very poverty should have induced you to stop when you saw me.' She wanted to help me to cry.

'No,' I objected, 'yours was not a frank poverty. It was made of ashes. It reproached me and my way of expressing myself. Therefore it offended me.'

She shook her head and said: 'Here is a present.' It was the notepaper.

I took a sheet and at once began to write. Standing behind me she could guess at my words and read them the moment before I wrote them.

'Here everything is so clear. To express oneself seems pointless.'

I turned and faced her: 'Where have you brought me? This is no place for me. I want to speak, I must. If you let me make a confession I shall be strong again, I shall be safe. But how can I when I am seen through, guessed at? I hate this transparency, this public game of truth which does away with shame and modesty. I hate it because it is the opposite of intimacy and of the discovery of the delicate and precarious truth which is life. You are all wrong. They have muddled you. Luring you with the false gift of light, they have taken

away everything, stripped you. No one in the world is as naked and poor as you.'

Meanwhile, hesitantly, my mother opened the shawl that covered her arms and shoulders, almost apologizing: 'I wanted to keep it for you, but . . . look . . .' It was a dead kitten. I let out a cry. At that moment I realized death. Rigid, yet almost restored by the shock of what I was going to say, I announced: 'Very well. But first I must go and ask someone's pardon. Otherwise it would be impossible.'

A winding road, then the bridge over the stream and just a little further on the avenue of acacia trees with rose hedges on either side. At the far end the gate is open. I go through it, walk over the gravel, enter the house and go upstairs, still meeting no one. Then I walk through a suite of rooms, convinced that I am seeking someone whose pardon I should ask. But in fact I am moving, walking, hurrying only because I am being followed. It is he before whom I am to humiliate myself who is pursuing me from afar and urging me forward with the tread of his enormous footsteps. The footsteps are not hurried, only inflexibly and confidently determined to achieve their object; they are footsteps of someone whose mind is fastened on a single word that is to be tested and clarified, a word as yet undefined that will presently thunder out an order and an accusation.

By advancing, the footsteps direct me. They have chased me from room to room until I find myself caught in one that has no exit; the last.

In a moment or two I shall kneel down, lift my arms, and lay my hands on the breast of my persecutor, first just my fingers, then my palms, at the same time pressing my head against his thighs and saying that I am wrong and that my wrong is fearful. Then, still accusing myself in a broken voice, I shall feel that my hands have reached his lips, touched them, and cut short the word of accusation that was about to be uttered. Who can deny that humiliation is a paroxysm of love!

But instead I am sheltering in the embrasure of the window pressed against the sill and compelled to look out. There far away I see my dead ones grouped between two cypresses,

shining as if at the end of a gallery of light. They lift their arms and call: 'Come!' They are mere emblems of acclamation, their bodies rising and falling as they beckon. And what is little Celia showing me? She is lifting a sheet of paper from an old exercise book, marked with little squares and folded in half. She shows it to me joyfully; she wants me to recognize it. It is the homework I once lost on my way to school. I honestly did lose it but the teacher refused to believe me and called me a little liar in front of the whole class. I have found it again, after so many years. It is curious that all lost things are there, even the faces of my childhood, even certain colours that changed under my eyes and that I afterwards sought in vain.

Yes, it will be good to confront once more the things of the past that have been washed with regret and remorse. And then they will be better than new—splendid with the wonder with which I will behold them. But, my God, don't hurry me. Don't you see how distressed I am waiting for this interview. I should have faced it when I was stronger, not now when I am stripped of every gesture. Soon my sense of sin will have gone; it will be dull and dead and impossible to recapture. Then I shall be abandoned in a new and horrible way. So stop your signalling, I implore you. It alarms and confuses me more than this new solitude. I must have a little silence so that I can achieve interior order.

I set myself to seek this silence, and it seems I can evoke it by casting on things a gaze that stops the beating of their pulse. But then I feel that pulse throbbing even louder, a whisper, a shiver, almost the painful excitement of matter. Then I think I know: silence lurks behind the empty mask on the wall between the two bookcases. If I stare tensely at it it will penetrate my soul. But to my horror, just as I think that silence is mine, the cheek-bones beneath the hollow sockets fill out with a minute smile that vibrates with the slight sharp violence of an insect: and now I hear its sound, like that of a drill on a crystal.

The footsteps meanwhile are approaching, are already within the house; the floor shakes. They are a blind man's steps: they come with a certainty deeper and more accurate

than that achieved from moment to moment with the eyes.

Suddenly I realize that I do not even know who this 'someone' is who will not allow me to beg forgiveness. My people outside, at the end of the bright passage between two cypresses, want to tell me. But I do not turn towards them. I fix my eyes on the door that in a moment will open and disclose my judge.

The door opened. My awakening was like a deep faint.

GIANNA MANZINI, who is one of the most distinguished of Italy's women writers, was born at Pistoia. Her style has been compared with that of Virginia Woolf. She directed the review *Prosa* for some years. Her books include *Boscovivo*, *Incontro al Falco*, *Rive Remote*, and *Lettera al Editore*.

GIUSEPPE MAROTTA was born at Naples in 1907. Writer and journalist. His works are: *L'Oro di Napoli*, *San Gennaro non dice mai no*, and *A Milano non fa freddo*.

EPILOGUE

GIUSEPPE MAROTTA .

(*Translated by Baptista Gilliat-Smith*)

‘**D**EAR Lord God,’ the old nun said, ‘now at last please arrange for me to sing and dance.’

‘Listen, this has been my life: I am seventy years old and a cripple now. My legs no longer obey me. But I can still suffer and I go on offering up my pain to you. My memory too is faultless. You can judge for yourself, dear Lord, from what I tell you. I was born in a hot town by the sea, towards the end of the last century. I was the second of twelve children. In those days people multiplied furiously; they were resigned to the duty of preparing the dead for wars to come. My name is Emma Cuomo. My only sister, the eldest, was called Elvira. Then came Carlo, Filippo, Augusto, Mario, Andrea, ten brothers in all. Our house was almost outside the town, in a wide street running away into the country. The sun used to beat down on the block and all the shutters of the first floor were kept closed almost the whole time. The bars of shadow which they threw across the floor for so many hours each day were an omen of my fate, though I little knew it then. We were twelve children and ten of us were always hungry. I was a very ordinary child, with curls and freckles, and that faint smell of feathers children always have. But I never thought about dolls, I thought about bread.’

(Here an angel came forward and in monotonous tones, as though reciting a poem from memory, he said: ‘White and golden bread in thick spongy slices, the long maternal loaves of southern villages, but also peasants’ coarse black bread, the sour bread labourers eat sitting by their furrows, and bread made of yellow flower that breaks up into golden nuggets, has a joyful beat of wings about it and is almost a meal in itself. I can testify that as a child Emma Cuomo dreamt about every kind of bread and I say this in all truth.’)

‘My father,’ the old nun went on, ‘was quite an important

State official; he earned as much as two workmen or a bit over. He also got an income from some little farms the Cuomos had owned from time immemorial, for whole centuries maybe. I'm saying this because if he'd decided to sell them it would have seemed like opening the tomb of his forefathers and scattering their bones one by one. He was a thick-set man, bearded and silent, who produced nothing but work and children. We used to see him at mealtimes. When he wasn't out attending to his important business he used to shut himself up in his study where he'd be found exhausted. As we tiptoed along the passage we could hear his pen scratching on paper, or the studious tread of his feet, pensive, marked with commas and full-stops like sentences. My father had only one aim in life: to prepare his children's future, to save up a dowry for his girls and to enable his boys to get university degrees. To bring this about he deprived himself and us of everything. He paid no attention to us and only noticed that we were growing older because the money he was saving for Elvira and me increased, or because my brothers passed from elementary to grammar schools. All the reins of the household were held by our relentless enemy, my mother. On nearly all of us, except Elvira and Andrea, she was perpetually imposing sacrifices, dealing out blows and insults. Lord God, don't command me to forgive my mother: she warped me, changed the course of my blood, destroyed me a thousand times after having made me. She's to blame for making me feel I was alone against the world. How is she going to pay for this? There are all sorts of kinks and deformities one can understand but why, dear God, do mothers of large families sometimes divide their affection unjustly, devote it all to one child or a few and fiercely deny it to the rest? My mother was small and shapeless, as hard as stone, a cold, enigmatic statue. Her real and only children were Elvira and Andrea. Carlo and I, Augusto and I, my neglected brothers and I remember her hands in the way one remembers a whip, for all the times they struck us. We remember her bosom because of all the times Elvira and Andrea nestled there and slept while we looked on in terror. Only at lunch were we allowed to sit round the table together. There would

be soup, hardly covering the bottom of the plate, then a mouthful of boiled meat or cheese, a piece of orange, then grace and our mother's glacial eye bidding us get down. But Elvira and Andrea were kept back: there was invariably some extra food for them, stewed meat, scrambled eggs, or a sweet. Behind his outspread newspaper my father dozed impassively. At breakfast and supper, which for us consisted of a soup made of bones and a slice of bread, Elvira and Andrea were fed separately. Mother once said that they needed a special diet because of their health. After this she no longer needed to justify herself.'

(Here the old nun paused to regain her breath. The angel came forward, stood beside her and spoke again with the even voice of a scholar: 'In children there are scales that weigh colours and light; the slightest beat of an eyelid can weigh on a child's heart like a stone. I am here to testify that Emma Cuomo's heart was bruised even before she realized she had one. Amen.')

'My father died without saying good-bye to us,' the old nun continued, 'but there were three graduates at home already, and there was a dowry for the two girls. I was a girl like Elvira, there's no doubt about that. Ask the angel if I wasn't the prettiest. My hair was black and heavy, I had a large solid body like the ones in frescoes or in the Song of Songs, the kind of body men dreamt about in those days.'

('Quite,' the angel agreed, 'but that's enough. Emma Cuomo was an attractive girl in her day and obviously made for love and childbearing. But her mother took all that away from her.')

'Lord God, I want to finish before death comes,' the old nun said. 'When she became a widow my mother no longer disguised her true feelings. She was as cynical as the time she made Carlo do Andrea's military service for him—this sort of thing was legally possible round about 1900—or like when she turned away my three suitors one after the other. Carlo didn't know how to rebel. All he asked for, just before setting out, was the blessing of a mother's embrace and a little money. But she sent word to him that she was unwell and couldn't see him. Carlo cursed as he left the house, I remember his face

in the dim light on the stairs, at dawn. This brother of mine went away for ever. Even when they wired him, twenty years later, that his mother was dead, he didn't want to see or forgive her. As for me, my rôle in the house was worse than a servant's. I was ordered about by our old maid and by everybody. I swept, made beds, did the washing and ironing. Time and time again as I bent over the sewing machine I watched the paraffin lamp fade in the morning light. Meanwhile the years went by. Except for Andrea, my brothers all left the house for good. Elvira got married. After she left my mother had to take to her bed. She ran a temperature, suffered and went as mad as though she were giving birth to Elvira for the second time. She had no peace until the following year when Elvira had a baby girl, Daria. She asked for, and obtained, custody of Daria. She brought her up artificially and didn't even allow Elvira to breast-feed her. The love she had showered on her favourite daughter was now focused on her grandchild, and became as intense and burning as the sun through a magnifying glass. In her dreams she planned a regal life for Daria. 'You will grow old,' she said to me, as though it were good news, 'and your dowry will go to Daria.' I was thirty years old then, but I was beautiful in spite of everything and my blood sang in my veins. I attracted attention, probably on Sundays at Mass. Three men asked my mother for my hand. They spoke to her, then disappeared for ever. The third time I couldn't resist eavesdropping at the drawing-room door.

'I heard my mother refer to some serious but trumped-up fault of mine; she even hinted at the existence of an illegitimate child. She said: "My heart bleeds at having to disclose this blotch on our family honour—Take pity," she said, "on a poor mother who implores you to go away and keep this a secret."' Why didn't I kill her, or kill myself? That same morning I begged my confessor to get me taken into a convent. A few days later I told my mother I was going to Church and I went—but for forty years. I never came out again. Dear Lord, I've been a nun in your service for forty years, and if to-day you have appeared to me with this angel, to me a poor old woman, paralysed but alive still, it means that I've

never denied you the prayers and respect I owed you. Perhaps you have forgotten or forgiven my laughter, that time I laughed uncontrollably in the dark empty church where I went barefoot one night after suddenly waking up with the certainty that my mother had died at that very moment. You must know, dear Lord, that I've been faithful to you, as a good soldier is to his colours, but that I was never able to be a real nun, living only in you and through you, truly exiled from the world, events, instincts, and blood. My prayer never became flesh, nor my flesh prayer: on the altar-steps, dented by my knees, I was always a woman, just an unhappy woman robbed of the human joy and suffering you created me for, robbed of the toil and rest, husband and children, the sun and rain you destined me to have and which I gave up only so as not to kill myself, or not to murder. And what next? Will it be, at last, what I ask for, dear God?

(Here the angel intervened for the last time, and as though reading from one of his books, he said: 'The stars are burning up. The skies will be consummated and come to an end. Everything, every element and creature exists so as to come to an end or to transform itself; but it can never go back to being what it was.')

'You keep quiet,' the old nun answered back—'And you, God, I beg you: please command that here and now, while I am still alive, this very day I should be made to sing and laugh.'

THE MACHINE

DINO BUZZATI

(Translated by Archibald Colquhoun)

IN spring, when the weather is good, I like riding on a bicycle round the Laiata heath, about fifteen kilometres or so from Milan. Isn't it extraordinary that there should be such solitary, almost wild spots right at the very gates of the city? There are no houses there, and one never meets a soul. And as the ground is all humps and little valleys, hillocks and precipices, nothing can be seen of the great suburbs which are yet so close; and one can imagine oneself to be in some very remote country, abandoned by man. Up and down those woods, meadows, ravines, and hills, wind little paths full of romantic surprises, and with smooth compact surfaces; to run over them on a bicycle is a delight.

I went there yesterday with Pietro Trevigiani, a cousin and friend of mine. I went in front, and he followed wheel to wheel.

Near Primana we left the main road and took a little country road, and from this, three or four hundred yards after the turning, we branched off on a narrow lane that we had already explored successfully before; it was one of those charming little paths I mentioned.

The pleasant thing about this little path is that at one point it runs into the middle of a grove of small fir trees and then suddenly comes out on the edge of the old Giant's Quarry, whose white gravel-pits and exquisite solitude suddenly break into view. One might be in Africa, on the edge of some mysterious wadi.

I was pedalling along fast, enjoying the fresh scented air, when the wood suddenly ended and I found myself full in the sunshine. Now the little path, I remembered perfectly, made a sharp turn at the bottom of a grassy ditch, then climbed steeply to the edge of the quarry, then began going

down again, over the gravel, to the main valley on the hillside.

'Here we are!' I shouted to my companion, and down we went at full speed into the dell to enjoy the run up the opposite slope. I tasted in anticipation the effortless run down the side of the quarry. But just as the rush brought me up over the valley, and my eyes, as often happens, jumped ahead to calculate the descent, I suddenly clutched at my brakes convulsively. Both of us leapt to the ground and stood there in silence, dumbfounded.

Right in the middle of the quarry, among the limestone blocks, where up to last week and for at least fifteen years before that there had been nothing but stones, weeds, birds, and butterflies, rose an enormous machine. It was a very complicated, strange machine, as high as a four-storey house, but I had never seen anything like it, even in plans.

What struck me was its terrible black colour, not a funereal, but rather a dazzling black. I had never thought that a thing so black could exist; but perhaps this excess of colour, so to say, was due, more than anything else, to the contrast with the brilliant white quarry glittering in the sun. Every little bit of it seemed enamelled with celluloid paint, like some luxury motor cars.

Its appearance was most peculiar and disquieting. In the middle of it there was a kind of smooth compact dome, without vents or windows; and all round the dome, at regular intervals, there radiated at an angle, what looked like the loose arms of a crane, in a tangle of antennæ each of which repeated exactly the same design. The antennæ were not trellised, but made of very long cables joined to each other in decreasing thicknesses. The whole thing was reminiscent of an empty gasometer, but was much vaster and more complicated. It was also surprising not to see anything that looked like a wheel, or a revolving axle, or a gear, or a shaft, or a command-cabin, or a ladder, or a seat, or any other sign of the presence of man in such a gigantic piece of machinery. What the devil could it be? The hermetically closed dome and particularly the circle of antennæ, formed of double shafts like the folded ribs of an umbrella, or more like closed

compasses, gave a sense of tremendous energy; also because the entire surface, every joint, every angle was smooth and clear and absolutely perfect, without a trace of a bolt, just as in the most powerful modern machines.

It was stopped; no smoke or sound was coming from it; there were no men around it. Who had put it up in such a short time? And how? It was as if the enormous machine had rained down from the sky.

'Holy Virgin!' said my cousin. 'What the hell is it? I say, let's go!'

'Go? . . . But I want to see what it is!'

'There's no one about,' objected Trevigiani. 'I hope it's not an electricity plant . . .'

'Those antennæ, you mean? But there aren't any wires.'

'It's really very odd there's not a soul about,' repeated Trevigiani, who was against going on.

The machine was so appallingly black, and so bristling with those incomprehensible crooked poles, that it did in fact give out a sinister power of its own. Round it the heath was silent and deserted, with the somnolent hum of insects over it. Wheeling my bicycle, I started to go down the slope, just as a try-out. Trevigiani stayed up on the verge, undecided.

My footsteps sounded unnaturally loud; it was hot. The nearer I got to it the bigger the machine seemed, with its aerial gear. The sun glistened on the shiny surface of the dome, on the round joints, on the antennæ; everything was still, full of mystery and silence.

I looked at the base of the extraordinary architecture; it was strange that there was no trace of a pedestal or platform. The antennæ furthest out which joined up at the top with other bigger ones fixed at the base of the dome, were resting directly on the gravel, propped on strange-looking curved hinges. I was not more than three hundred yards from it by now. I had stopped. A puff of wind came by. It seemed to me to whistle faintly between the frames of the machine with a vaguely metallic sound, but I did not see the antennæ oscillate.

I went another four or five steps forward and Trevigiani's voice surprised me behind my back. His voice sounded so

different that my chest went icy-cold even before I realized the meaning of his words.

'Giovanni,' he shouted, 'Look! Look!', I heard, and then the sound of his footsteps suddenly going back over the other side of the top, and then the clang of his bicycle as he dropped it.

I looked, and was nailed there by a boundless terror, which held me as if in a vice. One of the outer antennæ of the machine was moving almost as if it had a life of its own. It raised itself slowly off the gravel, poised itself in the air with its grapnel at the end, then came down with the same slowness and rested itself on the stones again, only a few yards further out, so that the original symmetry of the gigantic pylons was broken.

This movement was enough to make me realize finally the horror of the situation. The thing wasn't a machine, but a gigantic spider; and it had been in lethargy up to then, all shut up in itself, with its enormous legs drawn in.

I was completely in the open, full in the sunlight. The bicycle's handle-bars and bell were glittering brightly. There was not a crevice or cleft or ditch anywhere near where I could hide myself. And it was madness to think of defending myself against that monster as big as a battleship. Trying not to dislodge any stones, I drew very slowly back behind a bush at the side of the path. I could scarcely control my legs. I crouched down there, laying the bicycle on the ground with infinite precautions. To try and escape, which was my instinctive reaction, I realized would be the worst possible thing to do. I thought of Trevigiani, who was probably far away by now. Would he have rushed off to give the alarm? But what use would that be? Who could fight against it? Field guns would not have been enough.

And then—my heart sank with terror—the machine moved again. Now all the antennæ were quivering together (were there eight of them as with normal spiders? In my anguish I could not take anything in any more) and then with a lazy movement raised the ghastly dome, which was nothing else than the belly, a couple of yards off the ground. The spider had woken up. My heart was beating so violently

I could scarcely breathe. All the antennæ, opening and shutting with the play of the articulation, gave it a look of swarming confusion.

But the monster did not move forward. After turning itself round for a quarter of a circle, it lay down again on the dry surface of the quarry, and closed its folded legs around itself again; they settled back into their former position, so that they looked like the ribs of a gigantic basket. It reminded me of the implement hat-makers use to measure the shape of the people's heads, that kind of cylinder made of little moveable bars. Only this was about thirty yards high and could knock down a house with just the end of one of its legs, without any effort.

My situation had got a little better because the diabolic creature had gone to sleep again. But how long would I have to wait? Till night fell? And how would I dare try to get to safety even then, in the dark, across the heath? But looking through the little branches of the hazel bush that was hiding me for the moment, I noticed something appalling; at the base of the black dome which now showed at a different angle, there stuck out a cylindrical shape with various dents in it, and the end of this carried two globes, black too and very smooth, and about as big as cart-wheels; these were the eyes, and I noticed they were fixed on me. There was no evil in their look, nor any feeling that could be expressed in human language; only an icy animal fixity, like certain rocks, beyond good or evil.

A sudden swish of moving branches a few yards from me, made my heart jump; my nerves were in such a state of tension that I felt myself quivering with the sudden start. I looked and saw a small boy of about twelve or thirteen coming up through the bushes on all fours, holding something in his mouth, in the direction of the monster. He was a lean little boy with a thin pale face, and looked like one of the boys who hold candles in their hands during processions in May. And one had only to see how he was drawing in his cheeks to realize he was afraid; but he was going on in the direction of the monster even so. What the devil was he up to?

I confess I was filled with cowardly joy at the thought that

someone else was in the same boat as myself. I was not alone anyway. And perhaps the blind brutality of the spider would vent itself on him rather than on me. His innards and not mine would be sucked for its nourishment, and perhaps it might be satiated for a minute or two.

At the same time I felt an intense friendship for the boy—who was probably some peasant or other. Those short minutes of extreme risk were equivalent to long years of living in common, in drawing us together; he might be my comrade in a ghastly death. But he took no notice of me.

'Ssss . . . Ssss,' I hissed to warn him. He stopped suddenly, and flattened himself down on the ground with the same spasm of terror that I had had a short time before at his arrival.

I signalled to him with my right hand to ask what he was doing. With one hand he took out of his mouth something he held gripped between his teeth; and I noticed it was a forked piece of wood with a thick piece of elastic attached to it; a catapult. Then he put it back into his mouth with a gay smile, which was either real or forced, and was anyway incredible if one thought of the demon whose look was brooding over us. Then he slipped his hand into his jacket, which was stretched to bursting point, pulled something out of it and showed it to me; it was one of the pot-shaped hand grenades that are issued to the army, painted in blue and white stripes.

Was he mad? What did he think he could do with his little grenades? It was like trying to bring down a buffalo with a pen-knife, all it would do would be to hasten the disaster. I waved an arm in a decided way to tell him not to. He smiled again, put the grenade back into his pocket and crawled away through the bushes. 'No! No! Wait,' I hissed at him under my breath. But he did not seem to hear me.

I asked myself just for a second if it was not worth risking everything once and for all and trying to escape; by now the boy was nearer the spider, and worse off than I was. His death was getting more and more probable every second, and would give me a respite. But then was I sure the monster would choose the boy before me? Animals have often got a

dumb cunning; and he might possibly decide to make sure of the one escaping before the one going towards him.

It was useless. I had not got the courage and stayed where I was. The boy was very agile and was already a hundred yards or so away. I could not see him between the bushes any more, but the quivering of one shrub after the other showed me how far he had gone. The spider did not breathe, and seemed to have an eye always cast in our direction.

Everything in sight was still. But it could not last. Suddenly the boy got up on to his feet. He had decided to fling his life away. The indented shadow of the Moloch was almost touching him. He must have been about forty yards away.

I saw him load the catapult; I was too far away to see clearly. He raised his left arm with the wooden fork in it, and pulled back the elastic with his right. A black speck came out of it and curved off, but oh how slowly. It was a grenade. It fell among the nearest feet of the monster, and came to rest on the stones, without exploding. A little later the 'tac' it had made when it hit the gravel reached me. The spider did not move.

The boy stood still, looking. Then he took another grenade out of his pocket, put it into the catapult and shot it off. This time the projectile flew off straighter, about three yards above the ground.

I did not manage to see where it got to. But suddenly one of the terrible antennæ, one of the gigantic legs, folded up in a V and collapsed on one side like a falling tree-trunk. It went over with a crash as if it had been cut off at the base and fell on to the gravel, where it lay, a thin disconnected black streak. I had seen no flame or smoke, and heard no explosion. All I heard was a quick splintering of broken glass.

At the same time the skeleton-like limbs of the black demon shook frantically. All that could be made out was a confused frenzied waving of shiny poles; and the belly took three or four successive jumps to gather up speed.

The boy did not move. It was amazing; he pulled a third grenade out. As he shot it off the gigantic spider was already on top of him. Its body was raised right up high in the air and was coming fiercely down to seize him.

At that I screamed, but only a faint rattle came out. In the middle of the black oblong shadow which was the spider's thorax, a small yellow light was glimmering. The whole of the valley rocked with the explosion. And I saw something so extraordinary and so fantastic that I thought I must be dreaming. The whole of the spider's head, with its two globular eyes, shot away like a released cork. It was a black mass as big as a railway carriage. It shattered itself in a horrible way on the ground, tinkling as if it was made of the most fragile glass, like the balls that are hung on Christmas trees.

The whole of the rest of it collapsed in a few seconds, with grotesque quivers, and among greenish-coloured mucilage and innards flowing out of the cavernous wound; the antennæ fell away and collapsed into a quivering confusion of joints. All that remained of the monstrous leviathan was a black ball covered with tangled prickles, in the rigidity of death.

Without properly realizing why I was doing it, I jumped out of the bush and ran stumbling down towards the abject ruin. I found myself standing panting beside the boy, who was looking at it with satisfaction.

'It's pretty big, isn't it?' he said to me with a laugh. 'You see I managed to do it?'

The main mass of the carcass was still immense, with its mastadontic central blader and the labyrinth of its legs lying heaped over each other in shapeless confusion. These were receptacles covered with what looked like tar, which a stone would easily have broken open. And the whole thing was smeared over with loose slime and jelly-like threads revolting to see. A fetid nauseating stench came out of it.

'Let's just finish it off!' said the boy, and taking a bottle out of his pocket he threw it so that it broke just under the disgusting ruin. It was petrol. Then he shot another grenade at it.

With an obscene leap the whole carcass gave a jump up in the air, and broke up like mica as the flames spread. It took fire all over and the legs crackled like juniper, and dissolved and broke up into little pieces.

'My God!' I said from the bottom of my heart, and a deadly exhaustion came over all my limbs.

I looked around. It was evening. How long had passed? The fire had gone out and all that remained were heaps of black ashes, which were very light, and were being gradually dispersed by the wind. I rushed away, behind the boy who had already almost reached the edge of the quarry. The monster had dissolved, and yet a kind of oppression lay over the gravel. And as a yellowish moon of a size I had never seen before came up over the horizon, I had a presentiment that everything was not over.

DINO BUZZATI was born at Belluno in 1906. Writer and journalist. His works include: *Il deserto dei Barbari* and *Il Messaggio del imperatore*.

CESARE ZAVATTINI was born at Luzzaro, Reggio Emilia in 1902. He has written scripts for a number of highly successful contemporary Italian films such as *Quattro passi fra le Nuvole*, *Sciuscia*, and *Ladri di Biciclette*. He is the author of *Parliamo tanto di me*, *I Poveri sono matti*, *Io sono il diavolo*, and *Totò il buono*.

A PRAYER

CESARE ZAVATTINI

.(Translated by Archibald Colquhoun)

Do be kind now, if you're there give me some sign, do be kind, make a chair talk. I'll give you a year of my life in exchange. The chair's just come from Cantù. Make it talk, make it say: Oh faraway Cantù, oh near Cantù, if the glue's bad the pegs will come off. Why don't you open and shut the sky as quick as a wink and then I'll have seen you? D'you think there'll be anyone looking out of the window to see if the sky opens? The full moon makes everything so calm that everyone's sleeping with their faces turned upwards. You can make a soap-bubble, for instance, come out of a chimney-pot and what can that possibly cost you? A breath from you can dissolve it if you're afraid that passers-by will notice it. Let's let the passer-by go on. Now's the moment, come along, the cat that's shining there on the roof is just going to make a quick jump to get to the moon, but the surface is made of glass, it won't be able to get its claws into it and will fall off. Ah, you don't want to, you're not helping me. Then I'll take my shoes off and go to the maid's room. Shall I go in? She's called Giulia; she prays before she goes to sleep, and you reward her by changing her into a little brook when a little monkey like me talks. Look at her, she doesn't know anything about what's going to happen, or she'd shut herself up in the lavatory, and hide her blood-stained clothes under the water-heater, no, under the bath, where, where, my God? She'll say, 'Where, my God?' She'll let her ovule stay there in the warmth and wait for her husband's seed. She might kill herself with the gas as soon as she realizes her belly is really growing. Listen, you've still got a moment or two. I'll leave the door behind me open so as to see the sky. A chink, just a chink in the sky's enough. Hurry up, because I've already called out 'Giulia'.

She hasn't heard. I'll stay here in front of her with a smile

wider than the room so that she sees the smile when she wakes up and isn't frightened and doesn't shout out. I don't know what part of the country she comes from and yet she must come from somewhere. She's born.

I like her mouth (didn't I make it after all?) and her lips which would say 'My son is six months and a day old', if I had not had it aborted. Come along, move the chair, the chair's firm and hard, it smells of fresh paint; I paid a thousand lire for ten chairs yesterday. She moved her wax-doll eyes, and lights them up inside so that I can see her red heart dripping. You'll realize your mistake too late, when you hear Giulia sliding about looking for the fan, and me and my family are snoring. 'Giulia, Giulia . . .' This time I really will wake her up. 'Giulia'. I look like a mother waking up her little daughter. The moon's right in the middle of the sky, between the two half-closed shutters. Come on, you've still got a few seconds left; all you've got to do is to show me the shadow of your hand passing in front of the moon.

HOME MOVIES

CESARE ZAVATTINI

"(Translated by Baptista Gilliat-Smith)

ON Saturday night we were all sitting in the dining-room. First we saw *At the Zoo*, a short on zoological gardens, then a comic. My little daughter flung herself into my arms with laughter and I too laughed for countless reasons. Claudio set up the third reel we'd hired from the shop where we always got our films. Antonio shouted: 'Wait a moment!' and ran into the kitchen to fetch some bread. He came back munching a huge mouthful and sat down beside his mother. Now he was happy; nothing on earth could have added to his happiness. Giulio was doing card-tricks with the seven of diamonds which made Rossanna ask: 'Mummy, how does he

manage to be God?' In a few minutes a boat would appear on the white wall: *North Sea Fishing*—Claudio had called out the title printed on the box containing the reel. We all looked at the wall; the lights were turned out. I too was happy. (Is it wrong of me to be happy? 'Think of one soul in purgatory!' the priest said at confession. 'That's not enough,' I replied. 'A hundred, then' he insisted. I had to hold myself away from the grill of the confessional owing to his bad breath. He said wonderful things, but they ran off me like water off a duck's back because his breath smelt so bad. 'Three million souls,' he said. No, no! I can't help being happy. I'm happy because of that piece of bread my son has bitten into and my wife's hair that turns silver when it's caught in the beam of light crossing the room; because of the way the chairs creak and the way I'm sitting, propped against a piece of walnut furniture—it's worth so much to me this evening that it will never lose its value, never as long as I live—and there are certain postures that seem to have been traced for us long ago, like moulds waiting to be filled; you need only move your arm an inch to be unhappy.) 'The assistant's made a mistake,' I said. It wasn't *North Sea Fishing* but a drawing-room full of looking-glasses. A man was undressing quickly. He was in his under-pants. My children began laughing. The dark patch behind the man's shoulders was a curtain which opened to reveal a naked woman. In a flash the man took off his pants and the woman stretched out her arms to him. I gave a shout. Only for as long as my shout lasted was my children's attention distracted. My wife too jumped and screamed. Her hands beat about across the screen like bats. But the man had already grabbed one of the woman's breasts. 'Stop! stop!' I yelled. I could have died, hurled myself out of the window, gone down on my knees in supplication before the whole world, but nothing could stop that man. In a few more seconds we should have seen a close-up of the part of the woman towards which the camera was moving like a mouth. I kicked the table. Antonio turned on the lights. The projector lay on the floor, smoking. I threw myself on to it with the settee cover, but there was no need to. Antonio was examining it to see where it was broken. I longed for some-

thing to do until daylight, but what? They all stared at me. If only the thing could have burst into flames and burnt the furniture and the curtains. Then we should have had to call for help and had a fire to deal with. How I longed for something to talk about, something like a fire or an illness to complain about to people. 'To-morrow I'll sock that shop assistant, I'll stuff his hair down his throat, I'll drown him in his hair-oil.' If he'd been there I'd have strangled him because I didn't know what else to do or to say. I saw Antonio and Claudio struggling with the handle of the projector. 'Can it be mended?' I asked. They didn't answer and I didn't dare repeat my question. My wife had disappeared with the little girl. 'Is there any way of making something that has happened as though it hasn't happened,' I wondered. Impossible. This thing had happened for ever, for all my life, all the days of my life and of Claudio's life, and Antonio's, and for all the days of my wife's life and Rossanna's. The clock struck eleven. A long life was beginning, much too long a life. I wanted to drop into a chair, to be frozen to a stone rather than take even those few steps separating me from my bedroom.

GIUSEPPE DESSI was born in Cagliari, Sardinia, in 1909. He is a writer and teacher and his work includes *La Sposa in Città*, *San Silvano*, *Michele Boschino*, and *Racconti Vecchi e Nuovi*.

THE AWAKENING OF DANIELE FUMO

GIUSEPPE DESSI

(Translated by Archibald Colquhoun)

HE felt rather cold as he awoke. He shivered, as if he had not got enough covering on, rather as one does when one has thrown oneself on one's bed on a winter afternoon for a short nap and found one has slept till dark. And he was in fact completely dressed. He touched his collar, his tie, the lapel of his jacket of rough winter cloth, then his hand, stroking that familiar faraway roughness, and went down the whole of his body as far as his knees, and on as far as his feet. He had only cotton socks on his feet; and they were ice-cold. As he thought about it, he realized they were ice-cold. Not that this icy feeling was coming straight from his feet, which were hard and rigid, with the big toes turned, almost twisted back, under the thin tight stretched socks, but that he found they were that after he had thought about it. He found the same sensation over the whole of his body, which was just like his feet, hard, rigid, and ice-cold, so ice-cold that it made him think of a sledge he might be lying on in a dream, of a snowy slope, and of thin black trees scattered over the elemental winter view.

He realized with surprise that his hand was able to run over the whole length of his extended body, from the forehead to the feet. His hands were slack against his side. Then with that *other hand*, the one with which he was touching his body, he made a gesture he seemed to have made before, a quick gesture in three movements, and felt the shape of the zinc coffin around him. It had all happened before. He remembered perfectly. His terror too. He held his breath. He touched his closed eyes. He could hold out for a long time, as if he was under water, and knock meanwhile. He smiled to himself at the thought. He realized that his breathing was just a simple illusion, like his shiver of cold. He could breathe or not, as he liked; but breathing came more easily

than not breathing, even though it was only a thought. It was not even a habit, just the thought of a habit. Or, rather, a rhythm he could measure by.

Suddenly he remembered an old story about a lover who came back after a long absence and found the girl he loved dead, and stretched himself out beside her, shut his eyes and died.

That was what he must have done. He must have broken the last bond that still joined him to his body.

He felt no discomfort; it even seemed to him that he could if he wanted to pull himself up and sit. Or get up, or jump down off the bed and open the window. For there was nothing indeed to prevent him thinking that the feelings he had had up to that moment were anything but a dream or the last remains of a dream. Perhaps he would not be in his bedroom with the windows shut? But it might be night. He looked to one side. The windows should be on the right. He tried to find the wall with his hand but found the zinc side again, and followed its shape with his finger; it was broad at the top and narrowed down towards his feet in lines which, without ever joining completely, converged on some invisible point on the horizon.

Another shiver shook him.

He drew back into himself, and waited.

Everything was silent around him.

He suddenly felt that he ought to decide to break this spell.

And then, before he had come to this decision, he sat up without any effort.

He was detached from his own body and was yet keeping its shape. When he sat up he was half inside the coffin, and half sunk in the ground. He was like a root sunk in the ground and growing very slowly in a palpable consistency of time and space; an elementary space, a lengthy and melancholy stretch of time.

He let himself go slack, and felt he was spreading into the ground like water; he was becoming a fluid vapour going up through the ground and mingling with the air.

He came out on the surface and oozed over the grass.

A short way away was the earth thrown up by his grave.

The grass was all trampled down, and in the middle of the grass against the wall was the oblong provisionally marked with a rough wooden cross. He read his own name stencilled on a tin sheet: DANIELE FUMO. Ranged along the wall, up to the far corner, were the tombs of his family with marble stones and crosses.

Roses were growing between the tombs, and the ones furthest away, those of his great-grandparents and great aunts and uncles, whom he had never known, were almost hidden by their branches running wild, and covered with snails. Those untrimmed rose-bushes made him think of underwater plants, and the old tombs, too, darkened and covered with moss, seemed sunk in the sea. The tombs, however, of those who had died recently (Eudes, Fumo, Argei, etc. . . .) were white and smoothed with pumice-stone. It was a long time since Daniele had seen them. He had never liked going to the cemetery.

He thought of his own body, now, down there in the earth, like his father's, like his mother's, like Tilde's; and he realized he felt the same indifference to this. The fact that he was buried there too did not matter at all. He might, when he read the names written on the gravestones, feel himself seized by a fleeting tenderness, but the fact that their bodies were decomposing there had no importance for him. It was not them.

Suddenly he thought; 'And they? Where can they be?'

And immediately afterwards another thought took hold of him; This period of his between forms that could be touched, and memory, close to human shape and measure and the rhythm of breathing, could not last for long. This period was only a pause between two dissolutions, a drop of time, in which he was enclosed like a protozoa in a drop of water destined shortly to evaporate. His body was dissolving in the ground, that other part of him which was floating like smoke at a man's height, would be dissolved in the air. At once, too, if it just let itself go.

He walked along the tombs. He reached the corner of the damp dark surrounding wall. Then he turned back. He saw then that the tombs of those of his family who had died

recently looked older than when he had seen them a short time before. The black on the lettering was blurred and on some of the letters there was no trace of it. Tilde's tombstone was dim, and the writing TILDE ARGEI; very dim, and made him think of the pale lips of a young girl.

So the time passed. Months. As he was walking ten yards up and ten yards down. Perhaps years. It was he who was walking in time. Not in the past, perhaps, which had by now become destiny, but in the fluid, misty, and transparent future. Those roses were like old corals within it.

Suddenly he saw his own tomb. The earth was no longer freshly moved, but there was a tombstone on it like all the others, and it had already faded. He read: DANIELE FUMO, THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF AGE, A MODEL FATHER AND CITIZEN.

Now he did not know how many years had passed, how many were still passing at that moment, as he was reading and the tombstone became covered with moss and the writing on it was fading away.

He looked around. It was still a moonlight night, as it was at the moment he had sunk back into the earth after his awakening. It seemed to him that the moon had not moved very much, between the tops of the cypresses. The mountains could be seen, beyond the wall, outlined against the vast clear sky, slumbering through the time that flowed around their rocky flanks, and gradually wore them down. A thin dust was falling like mist to the very roofs of the houses.

Daniele lifted himself up so as to see the village better, poised himself in the air on this simple wish, along the trunk of a cypress which he wound round, becoming one with its leaves. He found this was the most restful way, and felt other undulating, silky presences about him, making the gentle breeze full of sound every now and again.

His breathing was a long uninterrupted inspiration.

He could look around him, if he wanted, towards the horizons around, or listen to the gentle rustle of the needle-shaped leaves. But he tried to concentrate himself and annihilate himself in that regular, continuous breathing, which was one with the great moonlight night.

POETRY

Note by the Translator.—Italian poetry does not translate easily, and contemporary poetry in Italy has difficulties all its own. The translator has not tried to write English poems bearing a ‘more or less’ relation to the meaning of the original. He has borne in mind English readers who may like to make their way word for word through the Italian texts. If he succeeds in persuading even those whose knowledge of the romance languages is slight to turn to what living Italian poets have written in their own tongue then he—and the readers—will be satisfied.—B. W.

LA PRIMAVERA HITLERIANA

by EUGENIO MONTALE

E quella ch'a veder lo ciel si gira . . .
(DANTE (?) a Giovanni Querini)

Folta la nuvola bianca delle falene impazzite
turbina intorno agli scialbi fanali e sulle spallette,
stende a terra una coltre su cui scricchia
come su zucchero il piede; l'estate imminente sprigiona
ora il gelo notturno che capiva
nelle cave segrete della stagione morta,
negli orti che da Maiano scavalcano a questi renai.

Da poco sul corso è passato a volo un messo infernale
tra un alalà di scherani, un golfo mistico acceso
e pavesato di croci a uncino l'ha preso e inghiottito,
si sono chiuse le vetrine, povere
e inoffensive benchè armate anch'esse
di cannoni e giocattoli di guerra,
ha sprangato il beccaio che infiorava
di bacche il muso dei capretti uccisi,
la sagra dei miti carnefici che ancora ignorano il sangue
s'è trasformata in un sozzo trescone d'ali schiacciate,
di larve sulle golene, e l'acqua sequita a rodere
le sponde e più nessuno è incolpevole.

Tutto per nulla, dunque? — e le candele
 romane, a San Giovanni, che sbiancavano lente
 l'orizzonte, ed i pegni e i lunghi addii
 forti come un battesimo nella lugubre attesa
 dell'orda (ma una gemma rigò l'aria stillando
 sui ghiacci e le riviere dei tuoi lidi
 gli angeli di Tobia, i sette, la semina
 dell'avvenire) e gli eliotropî nati
 dalle tue mani — tutto arso e succhiato
 da un polline che stride come il fuoco
 e ha punte di sinibbio . . .

Oh la piagata
 primavera è pur festa se raggela
 in morte questa morte! Guarda ancora
 in alto, Clizia, è la tua sorte, tu
 che il non mutato amor mutata serbi,
 fino a che il cieco sole che in te porti
 si abbàcini nell'Altro e si confonda
 in Lui, per tutti. Forse le sirene, i rintocchi
 che salutano i mostri nella sera
 della loro tregenda si confondono già
 col suono che slegato dal cielo, scende, vince —
 col respiro di un'alba che domani per tutti
 si riaffacci, bianca ma senz'ali
 di raccapriccio, ai greti arsi del sud . . .

HITLER SPRING

by EUGENIO MONTALE

(Translated by Bernard Wall)

And she to see whom all the heavens turn
 (Dante (?) to Giovanni Querini)

Thickly the whitened cloud from the maddened moths
 whirls round the pallid standards and on the embankments,
 spreads on the ground a pall that crackles
 like sugar underfoot: now imminent summer releases
 the night frost that it knew
 in the dead seasons' secret quarries
 in the gardens that from Maiano come leaping down to these
 sandbeds.

Down the corso just now there passed a herald of hell
 in flight through the cheering assassins, and a mystic gulf of fire
 beflagged with crooked crosses took him and swallowed him,
 the poor shops have been shuttered
 inoffensive though they too were armed
 with cannons and toys of war,
 the butcher has put up his bars, the one who adorned
 the snouts of goat kids he had slain with berries,
 the solemnities of still bloodless myths of killers
 have turned into a filthy morris-feast of flattened wings
 of ghosts on the mudflats, and the water goes on gnawing
 the banks and no man is any longer blameless.

Was all for nought then?—the Roman candles
 that slowly whitened the horizon at San Giovanni
 and the pledges and the long good byes
 strong as a baptism in mournful expectation
 of the horde (but a jewel shot the air distilling
 on the ice and shorelands of your coasts
 Tobits angels, the seven, the seed
 of the future) and the heliotropes born
 of your hands—burnt and sucked dry
 by the pollen that crackles like fire
 and stabs like a sleety wind . . .

Oh the wounded
 spring is still festive if this death
 freezes again in death. Once anew
 look upward Clizia, it is your fate, you
 who in all change preserve your love unchanged
 until the blinded sun you bear within you
 is dazzled in the Other or is confounded
 with Him, for all. Perhaps the alarms and sirens
 welcoming these monsters in the evening
 of their witches sabbath are already mingling
 with the sound unleashed from heaven, descending, con-
 quering—
 with a breath of dawn that may be manifest
 for all, to-morrow, white but without wings
 of horror in the burnt gravel of the south . . .

1939-1946

LETTERA ALLA MADRE

by SALVATORE QUASIMODO

«*Mater dulcissima*, ora scendono le nebbie,
 il Naviglio urta confusamente sulle dighe,
 gli alberi si gonfiano d'acqua, bruciano di neve;
 non sono triste nel Nord: non sono
 in pace con me, ma non aspetto
 perdono da nessuno, molti mi devono lacrime
 da uomo a uomo. So che non stai bene, che vivi
 come tutte le madri dei poeti, povera
 e giusta nella misura d'amore
 per i figli lontani. Oggi sono io
 che ti scrivo ». — Finalmente, dirai, due parole
 di quel ragazzo che fuggì di notte, con un mantello corto
 e alcuni versi in tasca. Povero, così pronto di cuore,
 lo uccideranno un giorno in qualche luogo. —
 « Certo, ricordo, fu da quel grigio scalo
 di treni lenti che portavano mandorle e arance,
 alla foce dell'Imera, il fiume pieno di gazzie,
 di sale, d'eucalyptus. Ma ora ti ringrazio,
 questo voglio, dell'ironia che hai messo
 sul mio labbro mite come la tua.
 Quel sorriso m'ha salvato da pianti e da dolori.
 E non importa se ora ho qualche lacrima per te,
 per tutti quelli che come te aspettano,
 e non sanno che cosa. Ah, gentile morte,
 non toccare l'orologio in cucina che batte sopra il muro,
 tutta la mia infanzia è passata sullo smalto
 del suo quadrante, su quei fiori dipinti:
 non toccare le mani, il cuore dei vecchi.
 Ma forse qualcuno risponde? O morte di pietà,
 morte di pudore. Addio, cara, addio, mia *dulcissima mater*. »

LETTER TO MY MOTHER

by SALVATORE QUASIMODO

(Translated by Bernard Wall)

'Mater dulcissima now the mists are falling
 the Ship in confusion hits against the dykes
 the trees swell with water, burn with snow:
 I am not sad in the North: I am not
 at peace within myself, but I await
 no one's forgiveness, many owe me tears
 from man to man. I know you are not well
 you live like all poets mothers
 poor and just in measuring your love
 for distant sons. This time it is I
 who write to you.'—At last, you say, a line
 from the boy who fled one night with a short coat
 and in his pocket a few verses. Poor he is
 and quickly moved, one day somewhere
 they'll kill him.—

Sure, I remember, it was on that grey quay
 for slow trains freighting oranges and almonds
 at the Imera's mouth, the river full of magpies
 of salt and eucalyptus. But now I thank you
 I wish to, for the irony you laid
 on my lips calm like yours.
 That smile has saved me weeping and much pain.
 No matter if now I have a tear for you
 and for all who like you wait
 not knowing for what. Ah courteous death
 touch not the kitchen clock that beats on the wall
 all my childhood was lived with the enamel
 of its face and with those painted flowers:
 do not touch the hands, the heart of the aged.
 Does anyone reply? O death of pity,
 death of shame. Goodbye dear mother
 Mater dulcissima.

LUCANIA

by LEONARDO SINISGALLI

Al pellegrino che s'affaccia ai suoi valichi,
 a chi scende per la stretta degli Alburni ,
 o fa il cammino delle pecore lungo le coste della Serra,

al nabbio che rompe il filo dell'orizzonte
 con un rettile negli artigli, all'emigrante, al soldato,
 a chi torna dai santuari o dall'esilio, a chi dorme
 negli ovili, al pastore, al mezzadro, al mercante,
 la Lucania apre le sue lande,
 le sue valli dove i fiumi scorrono lenti
 come fiumi di polvere.

Lo spirito del silenzio sta nei luoghi
 della mia dolorosa provincia. Da Elea a Metaponto.
 sofisticato e d'oro, problematico e sottile,
 divora l'olio nelle chiese, mette il cappuccio
 nelle case, fa il monaco nelle grotte, cresce
 con l'erba alle soglie dei vecchi paesi franati.

Il sole sbieco sui lauri, il sole buono
 con le grandi corna, l'odoroso palato,
 il sole avido di bambini, eccolo per le piazze!
 Ha il passo pigro del bue, e sull'erba,
 sulle selci lascia le grandi chiazze
 zeppe di larve.

Terra di mamme grasse, di padri scuri
 e lustrì come scheletri, piena di galli
 e di cani, di boschi e di calcare, terra
 magra dove il grano cresce a stento
 (carosella, granoturco, granofino)
 e il vino non è squillante (menta
 dell'Agri, basilico del Basento!)
 e l'uliva ha il gusto dell'oblio,
 il sapore del pianto.

In un'aria vulcanica, fortemente accensibile,
 gli alberi respirano con un palpito inconsueto;
 la querce ingrossano i ceppi con la sostanza del cielo.
 Cumuli di macerie restano intatti per secoli:
 nessuno rivolta una pietra per non inorridire.
 Sotto ogni pietra, dico, ha l'inferno il suo ombelico.
 Solo un ragazzo può sporgersi agli orli "
 dell'abisso per cogliere il nettare
 tra i cespi brulicanti di zanzare
 e di tarantole

Io tornerò vivo sotto le tue piogge rosse
 tornerò senza colpe a battere il tamburo,
 a legare il mulo alla porta,
 a raccogliere lumache negli orti.
 Vedrò fumare le stoppie, le sterpaie,
 le fosse, udrò il merlo cantare
 sotto i tetti, udrò la gatta
 cantare sui sepolcri?

LUCANIA

by LEONARDO SINISGALLI

(*Translated by Bernard Wall*)

To the pilgrim who approaches its passes
 and who descends through the narrows of Alburni
 or makes his way like the sheep along the sides of the Sierra

to the kite that breaks the line of the horizon
 with a reptile in its claws, to the emigrant, to the soldier
 to whomsoever returns from some sanctuary or from exile or
 who sleeps
 in the sheepcotes, to the shepherd, the labourer, the merchant
 Lucania opens out its wastes,
 its valleys where the rivers are slow flowing
 like rivers of powder.

The spirit of silence reigns in the communes
 of my sorrowful province. From Elea to Metaponto
 sophisticated and golden, problematical and subtle,
 it devours the oil in the churches, puts on a cowl
 in the houses, becomes a monk on rocky ridges
 grows with the grass on the thresholds of the tumbled villages.

The oblique sun on the laurels, the good sun
 with its great horns and odorous palate,
 the sun greedy for children, here he comes through the piazzas!
 He steps lazily like an ox and on the grass
 on the flint setts he leaves great stains
 and angular shapes of ghosts.

Land of fat mammas, of skeleton fathers
 dark and black polished, full of cocks
 and dogs, of woods and limestone
 poor earth where corn growth is stunted
 (grain, maize, and wheat)
 and the wine does not tingle (mint
 of the Agri, basil of Basento!)
 and the olive has the taste of forgetfulness
 the savour of weeping.

In the volcanic air, strong and fiery
 the trees breathe with an unusual sigh
 the oaks fatten their stocks with the substance of heaven.
 Piles of masonry stay untouched for centuries;
 no one turns up a stone for fear of feeling aghast.
 Under every stone, I tell you, you find the navel of hell.
 Only a boy can lean over the edge
 of the abyss to gather nectar
 among the root-stocks swarming with mosquitoes
 and tarantulas.

I will return alive under your red rains
 I will return without blame to beat the drums
 to tie my mule by the door
 to gather snails in the gardens,

Shall I see the stubble smoke, the thickets and ditches,
 shall I hear the blackbird sing
 under the eaves, shall I hear the she cats
 wail on the tombs?

PAESE

by LEONARDO SINISGALLI

Noi percorremmo tutto il paese nell'ora
 che tornano gli asini col carico di legna
 dalle cime profumate della Seira.
 Raspavano le orecchie pelose contro le grezze
 muraglie delle case, e tinniva, attaccata al collo,
 la campanella della capretta che il vecchio
 trascina al buio come un cane. Qualcuno
 ci disse buona notte seduto davanti alla porta.
 Le strade sono così strette e gli arredi
 stanno così addossati alle soglie che noi
 sentimmo friggere, al nascere della luna,
 i peperoni calati nell'olio.

Tu eri molto colpita dal colore delle montagne.
 'Forse sono state sotto il mare per millenni'
 'Quaggiù anche i sassi sembrano vizzi,
 anche le foglie hanno qualcosa di frusto'
 Uscivano dagli usci le donne coi tizzi accesi,
 'Nei nostri paesi il sole cade a precipizio,
 la notte è già nei rintocchi della campana di mezzogiorno'
 I cavalli tossivano di ritorno dall'abbeverate,
 i cani s'infilavano tra le porte:
 noi eravamo soli a pestare la cenere dell'aria.
 'Pare che tutta la gente a quest'ora
 torni a dormire sottoterra e poi risusciti
 ogni giorno alla vita.' La strada era senza
 rumori, come di cenci, scolorita.
 Da una casa serrata il caprone della tribù
 starnutiva dentro il letto di Margherita.

'Entriamo in casa dei nonni dove mia zia
 e mio zio hanno sempre una buona cosa
 conservata per me.' Ci sediamo in cucina e guardiamo
 l'incantevole famiglia delle chiavi appese al muro:
 la piccola chiave dell'orto, la chiave gigantesca
 della cantina che ha più di cent'anni. 'Mio nonno
 sapeva col fischio delle chiavi quietare
 il pianto dei nipoti.' Ecco la chiave argentea
 della conigliera, e le lucerne, i lumi, i lucignoli.
 Ingranditi sui muri guardo i profili
 dei miei parenti e le immense ombre
 delle mosche che strisciano come topi sulle pareti.
 'Cosima Diesbach, mia nonna, aveva girato il mondo.'
 'I miei avi hanno conosciuto l'Atlantide.'

Domenico passa di sera a chiudere le chiese,
 a sprangare il cancello dei morti.
 'Raccontavano a noi ragazzi
 ch'egli parlava con la civetta, sui tetti, lassù.
 Ha le orecchie mangiate, il campanaro,
 ha il sonno duro. Per vestire i defunti
 (non c'è nessuno più abile di lui)
 bisognava chiamarlo lunghe ore
 nel cuore della notte e fischiare forte
 nelle chiavi.' Domenico è lì che strofina
 uno zolfanello ai pantaloni, fuma la pipa
 assorto sulla ripa del valico
 dove una lontana sera vidi poggiare
 la bara del Cristo morto, alla ringhiera.
 Giù nella valle Crescenzo aizza la mula
 zoppa. 'Io ho buttato le redini sulla groppa.'

THE VILLAGE

by LEONARDO SINISGALLI

(Translated by Bernard Wall)

We traversed all the village at the hour
 when the asses return home with loads of wood
 from the Sierras scented tops. Their hairy ears
 were scraping on the walls of the rough houses
 the she-goat's bell was tinkling on her neck
 like a dog it guides the old man through the darkness.
 From a doorway someone wished us a good night.
 The streets are narrow and the pots and pans
 so jumbled in the thresholds that we could hear
 as the moon rose the peppers frying in deep oil.

The colour of the mountains moved you deeply
 'Perhaps they've been whole epochs undersea'
 'And down below the rocks also are faded
 and even the leafage has a battered look.'
 Women emerge from exits with their brands.
 'In our country the sun sets in a hurry
 night is present while the midday bell is tolling.'
 The horses coughed on the way from being watered
 and the dogs were slinking indoors
 alone we ground the ashes of the air.
 'It seems as if the people at this hour
 go sleeping underground and resurrect
 each day for life.' The street was soundless.
 discoloured as with rubbish.
 In a bolted house the he-goat of the tribe
 was sneezing in the bed of Margherita.

'Lets enter my grandfather's house where my uncle
 and aunt keep some good thing set aside for me.'
 We sit down in the kitchen looking
 At the fascinating family of keys
 hanging on the wall. The little key
 of the fruit garden, the great key to the cellar

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more than a hundred years old. My grandfather
 quietened his offsprings weeping when he whistled
 through the keys.' There is the silvery key
 of the rabbit hutch and the lamps, lights and lampwicks.
 Enlarged on the walls I see the profiles
 of the family and the enormous shadows
 of flies that creep like moles on the partitions.
 'Cosima Diesbach my grandmother toured the world.'
 'My ancestors knew Atlantis.'

Domenico goes by at nightfall to shut the churches
 and bar the gate of the dead. 'When we were children
 they told us he talked with the owl there on the rooftops.'
 The bellman is hard of hearing and sleeps deep.
 For laying out the dead
 (no better hand than he) you had to call
 for hours in the depth of the night and whistle fiercely
 on the keys.' Domenico there who is striking
 a sulphur match on his trousers, smokes a pipe
 mounted on the ridge of the ravine
 where one evening long ago I saw at rest
 the bier of the dead Christ on the parapet.

Down in the vale Crescenzo urges on
 the limping mule: 'I have thrown the reins in with the
 crupper.'

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 ove i morti stanno a convito
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 la mano che all'eco fiato ridona,
 alla forte amicizia del tempo,
 Della morte è soav^o il vino
 bevuto a sorsi d'anni,
 e il grano rimatur^e sempre
 per un cielo ignoto e fioco.
 Quale uccello sinistro
 il sole non^e nominato
 nella patria eterna dei morti.

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Far away from living fields
 and through two seas, one lazy with grain
 the other a pillager of the shores,
 the valley is swollen with ancient
 grottos and there are pallid rooms
 where the dead are at their banqueting
 on couches of stone. Sleep's harvest time
 pitifully slips by. On immemorial
 brows there is the ultimate kingdom,
 the hand that gives the echo back its breath,
 in the tenacious friendship of time.
 Drunk gulp by gulp with each passing year
 the wine of death is sweet; the grain
 grows ripe again under a dim and unknown sky.
 But, ill-omened bird, the sun
 is never named in the eternal
 fatherland of the dead.

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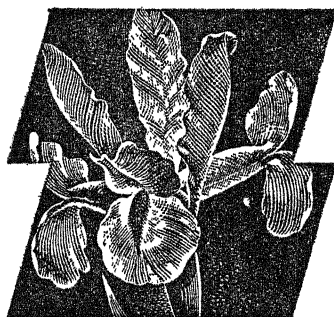
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Stagione intensa di pianura,
estate,
la cicada non vuole foresta,
sulla pietra è lamento di lunga
arsura. M'arrendo alla terra
che nella luce s'adombra nemica
e già l'occhio perde il suo cielo:
è più docile il sonno che l'acqua
nella vena dei prati.
Non mi dite che il mare
è là dove mi penso un lento
deserto e si scava alla sete
una grotta e barche a riva
muove un ricordo di vento.
Fatue reti impigliano il sole
all'asciutto e il passero fuggito
alla mano del fanciullo
che a questo mattino somiglia.

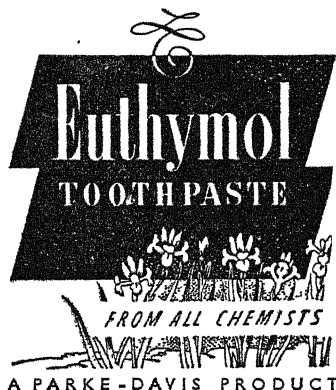
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Summer,
the plain's vehement season.
The cicada will have none of the forest;
on a stone there is the bewailing
of a long heat wave.
I surrender myself to the hostile earth
that in the light takes umbrage;
the eye has already lost its sky.
Sleep is more submissive than water is
in the meadow's veins.



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Don't tell me that the sea is there
 where my thought sees only an idle desert
 and digs for its thirst
 a grotto, and moored at the shore
 ships revive a memory of wind.
 Futile nets enmesh the sun
 in an arid place. A sparrow escaping from a boy's hand
 resembles the morning.

EUGENIO MONTALE is one of the most distinguished of all living Italian poets. He comes from Genoa, but he has lived for many years in Florence and elsewhere. He was born in 1896. His two volumes of verse *Ossi di Seppia* (Cuttlefish Bones) and *Le Occasioni* have formed a central point round which much contemporary poetry and criticism have turned. He has written on Eliot, Pound, Valry, and other contemporaries, and besides poetry and criticism he has done short stories. For some years he was silenced by the Fascist regime owing to his unwavering hostility to it.

SALVATORE QUASIMODO is a Sicilian from Syracuse. He was born in 1901. He is a well-known contemporary poet, and he has translated Greek lyrics and certain works of Shakespeare. His works include *Acque e terre*, *Oboe Sommerso*, and *Erato e Apollion*.

LEONARDI SINISGALLI was born in Lucania, Southern Italy, in 1906. He has been connected with broadcasting and films. He has written autobiography, dialogues, and mixed reflections as well as poetry. His works include *Quaderno di geometria*, *Vidi le Muse*, *Fiori pari fiori dispari*, *Horror Vacui*, *L'Indovino*, *I Nuovi Campi Elisi*, *Belliboschi*, and *Quadernetto alla polvere*.

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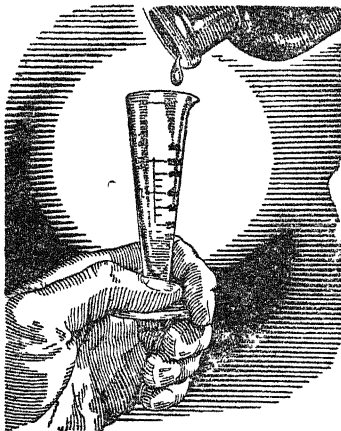
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EDITORIAL

September, 1949

THIRTY-FOUR years ago, in 1915, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, addressing students assembled for the Michaelmas term at Cambridge, used these words: 'In a world where man just now seems chiefly to value science for its power to slay, we hold to something as strong as it is benign, and careless of death because immortal.'

He was speaking of a play by Shakespeare, at the beginning of the second year of a war which was going to decimate his listeners; we, the survivors of that, are now in our sixth year of emergence from one which, perhaps, in terms of statistics, laid less toll on our bodies but has left us more maimed in our minds. Yet I find those words still hold true. They recurred to me yesterday as, returning from an expedition, I found in the town of Chesterfield, just off the market, another book which told me, as had done Q's once, what I wanted to know.

I had been to a ceremony which goes beyond the date of *The Tempest*, to his lecture on which he had prefaced those words. The ceremony was well-dressing. It is, if not common, widespread in Derbyshire, Tissington being the centre best-known. To-day, however, well-dressing there is in abeyance, though it is hoped to resume next year. Even so, Tissington dresses its wells on Ascension Day. It was, accordingly, to Barlow I went, since there they 'dress' on the Wednesday following St. Laurence's Day (10th August). In the Norman church, dedicated to that Saint, there is an evening service, after which a procession to the Main Well opens the festival. There are two other wells, Commonsides and Top Common, but these have no religious 'blessing', though there is great competition in the 'dressing'. For the benefit of 'foreign' readers—which the men of Barlow would term all outside Derbyshire—I will outline in what 'dressing' consists.

You 'dress' your well as you dress your tree, as a form of thanksgiving. With wells, for water. The 'dressing' takes the form of pictures placed round or over the well, as in a shrine,

and decorated as if they are the altars which, indeed, they are. (At Barlow's Main Well, you throw coins before them, as at the Madonna del Sasso, above Locarno.) These pictures, offered to the well and what makes it spring, are composed entirely of the flowers which bloom through its watering. They are not simple floral designs, but elaborate pictures, pressed into beds of clay, illustrating usually a Biblical incident—though this year Top Common's 'dressing' represented H.M.S. *Amethyst*. They can measure as much as twenty feet. The Main Well at Barlow yesterday had two centre screens flanked by sidepieces; Commonsides was a triptych, and Top Common one—but that is recent and only lately started by young people. Thousands of flowers are used for these and they cannot be made far ahead of time; the work must be done in a week, and the night before the opening is usually sleepless for the artists, who are all working men.

I must say at this point that it is not a use of flowers which it contents me to see, but the point I would make now is that instead of setting vases before a picture or image on an altar, the flowers are made into that image itself.

If an artist is very confident, he will sketch the design directly on to the clay; otherwise stencils are used. It will give some idea of the ambitious intricacy of the work when I say that this year the subjects included the Miracle of the Water Turned Into Wine and Christ Appearing to the Disciples at Emmaus; other years there have been The Woman of Samaria (Yulgrove), The Finding of Moses (Stoney Middleton). Everything in the picture—flesh, robes, sky, water—is represented by flowers or 'what grows'. Bracken makes hair, bark beards, clouds are meadowsweet and beans are pressed into service as stones. Christ's robe will be of roses, sandal-straps of Golden Rod, while Nelson, in coat of mauve stocks, his epaulettes being marigold, salutes the *Amethyst* sailors whose blue is literally cornflower. So expertly are the pictures made that from as near as ten feet on a bright summer day, or floodlit night, one has to peer, to pick out the component parts.

Barlow, where the pictures are made in position at the well and not carried to them, as elsewhere, maintains severe

standards. Even Wirksworth declares 'Th' only place as may rival us at aw iss Barlow'. Tissington, which began it, grew lax of late. Foreign flowers were imported—and dyed; rice was used and the dressers were paid. At Barlow all is voluntary, not even prizes are wanted and the dressing is done mainly by men. Wirksworth is one of the few places where women assist in the dressing, but there they use the petal-technique. At Barlow, as at Cutthorpe and in Derby itself, 'Flower heads are used complete, not overlapping, but tightly, side by side.' Last year at Cutthorpe a new board for the clay, measuring sixteen feet high by five across, cost £58, and these are not rich villages. Yet for years men have given up a week's pay or gone without their annual holiday in order to dress the wells. Villagers help by providing flowers, but this year the drought necessitated expenditure at florists. Despite this there were four pictures at one, three at another, and one all by itself, up towards t' moor. They were vivid in crimson, magenta, orange, yellow, fennel-stalk-green, white, mauve, pink, and purple from rose, chrysanthemum, aster, stock, daisies, geranium, lobelia, ling—dabbed carefully into clay, twined round poles, set up as wayside shrines, on a twentieth-century road, with special buses run to them, ice-cream vans all around, and a fair in the midst offering not only 'Dodgems' but donkey-rides.

Each well was some distance apart, and as I walked, and as I looked at these transitory labours of a so lasting love, I recalled another festival to which earlier this summer I had made it my business to find my way—Corpus Christi at Kippel, in the Loetschtal. There, too, at the entrances to the village, were shrines set up. There, too, the evening before, flowers were woven by the villagers into set-pieces—so that, in the morning, behind men from Goppenstein memorially dressed in the uniform of those Swiss who had fought for the Duke of Naples, girls could carry to church the Emblems of the Crucifixion, followed by the women in their flower-broidered aprons of Valais and their ceremonial headdress of black hat fronted with a tier of stiff metallic stitching of flowers; once these were chaplets of real flowers, but they were found to fade.

This was a strange, archaic scene, to stand amid, in the lane flanked by pasturage, the Guards in their scarlet, the virgins in their white (with crêpe-soled shoes), the married and elder women in black, the Church in the open, so that all Alpine bells mingled.

Two days after that, on my way for the heights above Saas-Fee, we saw at Saas-Grund a huge cross of trollius, set for *Segensonntag*. Two years earlier there had been one of gentians at Zermatt. . . the same impulse here, in Derbyshire, as there, Valais; the same method, using the same means to reach an end I had met earlier this year, Shrove Tuesday, in Haiti. There, in the hills above Port-au-Prince, the whole art of the priest as he traced his designs on the earth, which had to be fed with libation, in the flour that fed us, lay in the doing. Significance of the art lay in the skill or inspiration of the act. Once done, the design could be trampled on by the dancers. The Divinity had been in the doing.

In Haiti, too, there had been Papa L'Ours, clad in streamers, with a tail no bear has ever had. There were attendants, painted blue. Blue maybe shows better on dark skins than would white with which, formally bloodstreaked, those we call Clowns with us portray the Resurrection of the Lord: but blue means woad to me, and Papa L'Ours in his costume of Jack i' the Green came into my mind four months later at Kippel, when I saw larch tied round poles, and flowers set therein and bowed down to.

Valais, of which Kippel has the good fortune to be part, is viaduct for Italy. Here, too, in Derbyshire, explanation of well-dressing is given as mosaic-craft learnt from the Romans, and that other local craft, of pegged rug-making, so mosaic in design, would bear that out. But why flowers, in a county where they do not grow as lavishly as in, say, Cornwall? That of course is why. You give what means most. And next to flowers comes, time—leisure. And with leisure, the skill of your hands. This is no dying craft. It is, indeed, reviving. Some men have dressed wells for fifty years. At Barlow this summer a grandfather, his son, and his grandson worked together. The skill of many generations goes into a craft which shows no signs of perishing, though the nature of the

materials means that the results, the offerings, cannot last more than a week at most.

Pondering on this, not entirely approving the use of flowers, which seemed to me a rationalizing of the urge to destroy, this being a fox-hunting and bird-killing land, and feeling the colours, quite frankly, harsh, I returned to Chesterfield, where I found, so quickly as almost to have been 'given' it, a book called *The Beauty and Mystery of Well-Dressing*, by Crichton Porteous. From it I have taken the quotations and such information as is not to be gathered from other sources. The author, as our readers will know, is a Derbyshire man and he has written a glowing book, without being too *Countryman* about it. The price is 15s. but both text and the wealth of coloured and other photographs make it worth more than double. It is published by the Pilgrim Press, Derby.

Barlow, like other places, first dressed its wells as thanksgiving for improved water-supply. When, in 1920, the Duke of Rutland sold property in that district a special deed was made, giving Main Well to the dressers for ever. Tissington traces the custom to the Black Death, when the purity of its water saved the people from plague (Plague Sunday at Eyam is next week, 27th August). It is alleged that well-dressing goes further back, to the habit of pilgrims tying rags on bushes, both as thanks for refreshment and as sign for future travellers. Man's instinct for design led him to make pattern from those rags, and his instinct towards self-preservation let him make art out of the pattern. Man's need for water led him also to worship its Source, and so in Haiti, in Kippel, in Barlow, there is to be found the same thing as is implicit beyond those words of 'Q', delivered in war-time—a co-ordinating of impulse seen beyond to-day's usurping wrangles. We shall all suffer no doubt from what, by the time this is read, will be happening in England, America, Malta, Yugo-Slavia, South Africa, West Germany. The 'Pinks' as Shaw belatedly calls them, prefer to suffer. Their belief in suffering as good for other people is one of the 'benefits', which along with fish-and-chips and the F.B.I. Fair, they confer on mankind; they really cannot understand why other races don't like suffering as much as they do. For the last fifty years the

'Pinks' have chosen, with few exceptions, shoddy men to form shoddy governments which would be bullied into providing shoddy pleasures instead of work in which pride could be taken. The result of half a century of this is pictures that move, so many cars that they can't, and caravans that aren't meant to; floodlighting at night, and in the daytime spectacles to befog what little sun we get; not enough food to bite, and gum to chew; sport made a business and business made a half-hearted game, five hours a week, both sides losers; ice-cream *ad lib* and decent soap on the ration.

It would seem, to put it plainly, not inspired. Lack of progress, even if accepted, is not, however, the same as Gadarene descent. To quote again that gay gentleman whose *Buoyant Billions* at Malvern is by no means his *Tempest*, 'I can go to the nearest oilshop and for less than one shilling buy enough to blow this house and all its inhabitants to smithereens . . . But I don't do it.' Not he, perhaps; though others try to. And is it necessary for any of us to blow up any of the rest, men's death-wishes being what they are? Guido Fawkes was before his time; the Stuarts went out quite nicely without him—though, of course, one good blow-up in that case might have saved many deaths in Civil War (though probably not; men would have fought about *that*). One reason why the Stuarts had to go out was the poverty induced in the exchequer by the nuptials James gave to that Elizabeth of Bohemia, for whose wedding *The Tempest*, though not written for it, was performed.

Meanwhile, made gayer by *Buoyant Billions*, we too survive—into our sixteenth year and here take pleasure in presenting from Sweden, a country whose Midsummer rites I saw in 1939, a fingerful of writers who come as heralds to the handclasp of others in our fully Swedish issue next month.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

JACK LINDSAY

CHARLES DICKENS was in a driven demoniac state of mind when the idea for *A Tale of Two Cities* came to him. The bracelet he sent to Ellen Lawless Ternan had fallen into the hands of his wife Kate; and he was determined to end his marriage and to seduce Ellen. But he was in the midst of the rehearsals which had finally brought himself and Ellen together; and he could not pause to think. Amid Kate's tears, Forster's disapproval and a generally unnerving situation, he carried on in his furious possessed fashion, determined to have his own way and yet to keep his hold on the public; and in the midst of this spiritually and physically racked condition, as he was holding back his agony of mind by acting and producing *The Frozen Deep*, the central idea of the novel burst upon him.

So much we know from his own statement. It is clear then that we should be able to find the imprint of his ordeal, his tormented choice, in the novel. One would expect writers on his work to concentrate on this problem; but so abysmally low is the standard of Dickens criticism that no one has even seriously raised the question at all.

i

Where then is the imprint of the situation to be traced? By solving this point we can begin to understand what the novel itself is about, and the part it plays in Dickens' development. One general aspect of the selection of theme is at once obvious. The deep nature of the breach he is making with all customary acceptances is driving him to make a comprehensive effort to grasp history in a new way. So far (except for *Barnaby Rudge*) he has been content to use certain symbols to define his sense of basic historical conflict and movement. Yet all the while the influence of Carlyle, both in his *French Revolution* and his prophetic works like *Past and Present*, has been stirring him with the need for a direct statement of the historical issue as

well as a symbolic one; and now, as he is coming close to a full confrontation of his opposition to all ruling Victorian values, he feels the need to set his story of conflicting wills in a manifestly revolutionary situation: that on which he had so long pondered as holding the clue to the crisis of his own world.

He had read and re-read Carlyle's history, till its theme and material were richly present in his mind; and now he wrote to the master asking for a loan of the cited authorities. The story goes that Carlyle jokingly sent him all his reference-books, 'about two cartloads.' And in the novel's preface Dickens wrote:

It has been one of my hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book.

But though this need to make a general reconsideration of the nature of historical movement and change was certainly central in the impulse that Dickens felt, he had to fuse the overt theme with a more immediately personal nexus of emotion and imagery before it could take full grip of him. In the midst of his domestic misery and frenzied play-acting he did not feel simply an intellectual need to revalue history. The desire to break through obstructions and to mate with Ellen could turn into the desire to write about the French Revolution only if some image or symbol made him feel a basic coincidence between his own experience and the Revolution. What then was this image?

It was that of the Imprisoned Man in the Bastille. The Lost Man who has been jailed so long that he has become an automaton of oppressed misery; who has forgotten even the source of his wrong, the cause of his dehumanizing misery; who needs to break out of the deadly darkness of stone in order to become human again, to learn the truth and regain love.

Here then is the core of the novel. The originally-intended title was *Recalled to Life*. Though Dickens dropped this for the whole novel, he kept it for the first part, and it expressed the originating emotion of the story. *A Tale of Two Cities* is built up from the episode of Dr. Manette's unjust imprisonment; and its whole working-out is concerned with the effects of that

unjust deprivation of light and joy: effects which entangle everyone round the Doctor and recoil back on his own head in unpredictable ways. The Doctor's fate is thus for Dickens both a symbol of the Revolution, its deeds, causes, and consequences, and of himself, immured in a maddening cell of lies and cruelties, and seeking to break through into the truth, into a full and happy relationship with his fellows. It was the demented sense of envioning pressures, of an unjust inescapable mechanism, which caught Dickens up in the midst of his wild mummery and gave him a sense of release when he determined to write the novel.¹

It has been pointed out (by T. A. Jackson) that there is a close underlying similarity between the plot of *A Tale* and that of *Little Dorrit* (the preceding novel in which Dickens had at last fully marshalled his condemnation of Victorian society). Both Dorrit and Manette are imprisoned for a score of years; both are released by forces outside their control and then continue tormented by their jail-experience. Dorrit is haunted by fear of social exposure, which comes finally in the collapse of Merdle (the exposure of the theft basic in the economic system). Dorrit thus from one angle embodies Dickens's deep fears of the past, fears of being exposed, fears of being driven back on the terrible moment of loss which therefore threatens to return in exacerbated form. He also embodies the bad conscience of a whole society which dares not contemplate truly its origins. But in Manette the symbolism goes much deeper. The experience of oppressive misery has not merely twisted him, as it twisted Dorrit; it has broken down the whole system of memory in his psyche. The problem then is: What can restore consciousness? what can connect the upper and the hidden levels of the mind again? Manette is kept going by a blind exercise of the craft learned in the cell of oppression, and only the intrusion of events from the Revolution can bring him back to an active consciousness and release him from his obsession. But the drama of objectifying in action the pattern

¹ We must not forget that from the 1790's the people had called Poor Houses *Bastilles*, and often burnt them down in a memory of the Bastille-attack. The use of the symbol here has therefore its links with Dickens's deep hatred of the Poor Law which he identified with his own child-fear of loss and rejection (especially in *Oliver Twist*).

of memory, the repetition-compulsion which must be broken, inevitably brings its shocks, its apparent evocation of forces as destructive as those working from the traumatic level. The test lies in the way that evocation is faced, the way it works out. So Manette finds that the bitterness engendered by his sufferings as an innocent wronged man has tangled him up in a net (inside a larger reference of social action and reaction, guilt and innocence) from which escape is possible only after a great sacrifice has been made. The old must die for the new to be born; man cannot attain regeneration without accepting its sacrificial aspect. In the story this appears in the struggle between Darnay and Carton for Manette's daughter, and the solution that mates Darnay and the girl, yet sends Carton to a regeneration in death.

In this dire tangle of moral consequences we see Dickens confronting his own confused situation and trying to equate his own moment of painful compelled choice with the revolutionary moment in which a definite break is made with the old, amid violent birthpangs, and makes possible the rebirth of life, the renewal of love and innocence.

The lacerated and divided state of Dickens's emotions at this moment of choice is revealed by the device of having two heroes who are practically twins in appearance and who love the same girl. Both Carton and Darnay are generous fellows, but one is morally well-organized, the other is fecklessly a misfit. The latter, however, by his devoted death reaches the same level of heroic generosity as his rival; indeed goes higher. His gesture of renunciation completes the ravages of the Revolution with its ruthless justice, and transforms them into acts of purification and redemption, without which the life of renewed love would not be possible.

Thus, in the story, Dickens gets the satisfaction of nobly giving up the girl and yet mating with her. He splits himself in the moment of choice, dies, and yet lives to marry the beloved, from whom the curse born out of a tainted and divided society is at last removed. And at the same time he is Manette, the man breaking out of a long prison-misery, who seeks only truth and justice, and whose submerged memory-drama projects itself as both the Carton-Darnay conflict and

the socially-impinging dilemma that disrupts and yet solves that conflict.

There are thus a number of ambivalences in the story; and Dickens shows himself divided in his attitude to the Revolution itself. His petty-bourgeois fear of mass-movements is still alive; but the fascination of such movements, which stirred so strongly in *Barnaby*, is even keener than the fear. On the one hand he clings to the moral thesis to defend the Revolution: the Old Regime was vilely cruel and bestialized people, it could not but provoke excesses in return as the bonds slipped. But this thesis, to which Carlyle had sought to give a grandiose religious tang, now merges for Dickens with a deeper acceptance:

Crush humanity out of shape once more under similar hammers and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind.

Six tumbrils roll along the streets. Change these back again to what they were, thou powerful enchanter Time, and they shall be seen to be the carriages of absolute monarchs, the equipages of feudal nobles, the toilets of flaring Jezebels, the churches that are not my Father's house but dens of thieves, the huts of millions of starving peasants.

This passage begins with the simple moral statement; but the tumbrils, conjured up as mere counterpoises to the feudal carriages, become emblems of a great purification sweeping away the reign of the old iniquity. They express a ruthless *transformation* of society and are far more than an allegory of cruel tit-for-tat. Rather, they appear as forces of triumphant righteousness.

Throughout the book there runs this ambivalent attitude to the Revolution, shuddering, yet inclining to a deep and thorough acceptance. Not a blank-cheque acceptance, but one based on the subtle dialectics of conflict revealed by the story of Manette. For that story, symbolizing the whole crisis and defining its tensions in the depths of the spirit, makes a serious effort to work out the process of change, the rhythms of give-and-take, the involved struggles with their many inversions and opposed refractions, the ultimate resolution in death and love, in the renewal of life.

The working-out of the clash of forces is in fact more thoroughly done than in any previous work of Dickens. The weakness lies in the comparative thinness of characterization. The strain of grasping and holding intact the complex skein of the story is too much for Dickens at this difficult moment of growth. But his instinct is, as always, right. He needed this strenuous effort to get outside himself: no other way could be master the difficult moment and rebuild his foundations. After it he could return to the attack on the contemporary world with a new sureness, with new thews of drama, with new breadths of comprehension. The great works, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*, were made possible. (I am not here dealing with those works; but it is interesting to note that the imprisonment-theme finds its completion in the contrasted and entangled themes of Miss Havisham and the old convict, the self-imposed prison of the traumatic moment and the socially-imposed prison of the criminal impulse, both merging to express the compulsions of an acquisitive society.)

A Tale is not a successful work like the two novels that followed it, but they would never have been written without it. An inner strain appears in the rigidity of tension between the thematic structure and the release of character-fantasy. Such persons as Manette, however, show a new persistence of psychological analysis, and the Defarges show what untapped sources of dramatic force Dickens could yet draw on. The final falsification of the book's meaning came about through the melodrama based on its material, in which the emphasis put on Carton sentimentalized away all the profundities.

Lucie is meant to represent Ellen Ternan; but at this stage Dickens knows very little about the real Ellen, and Lucie is therefore a stock-heroine. Charles Darnay, the winning lover, has the revealing initials *Charles D.* Dickens with his love of name-meanings can seldom resist leaving at least one or two such daydream-admissions among the names of a novel. Ellen was acting as Lucy in *The Frozen Deep* at the time when the novel's idea came.¹

¹ In view of the deep and ceaseless fantasy of word-play in names in Dickens's work, it is no accident that *Manette* reversed is *Ternan*, not so unlike *Ternan*. Lucie Manette = Lucy (Ellen) Ternan.

This analysis, drawing its method from a study of the way in which Dickens uses symbol and allegory in his novels, has enabled us to get under the surface, on which discussion has so far played. We can at least see roughly why the themes of *A Tale* burst out so magically in the midst of his personal crisis. What are those themes? The theme of the man released from a long deforming prison-experience into a new life, who carries against his will into the new life a repetition-compulsion from the past, and who thus has to discover as completion of his release the way of ending that compulsion. And the theme of the sacrificial death, which ends the compulsion and transforms violence into its opposite; which ends the whole vicious circle of the curse.

By noting the sources from which Dickens's to a considerable extent drew these themes, we get important sidelights on to his creative intention. For Dickens was so closely entangled with certain currents of symbol-development in his day that we cannot get right inside his work unless we continually relate it to these currents of influences. So far the study of Dickens has been quite superficial and has neglected this aspect of his work.

In seeking the spiritual impacts behind any turn of development in Dickens it is always safe to look at Bulwer-Lytton's work; for that writer throughout his novels drew powerfully on certain traditional imagery, carried on from folk-days in various forms of popular or semi-popular expression. He influenced Dickens at decisive moments again and again: for example, his *Paul Clifford* led on to *Oliver Twist*, his *Night and Morning* led on to *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The work of his which underlay *A Tale of Two Cities* was *Zanoni* (1842).

Zanoni's method links closely with that of *A Tale*. Bulwer is openly writing a symbolic account of the creative process, in which all the characters, one way or another, represent phases or forms, types or anti-types, of the creator in his movement to enlarged or constricted life. This method is more rationalized in *A Tale*, but it is present in a degree that Dickens would scarcely have reached without knowing Bulwer's book. Further *Zanoni* takes the French Revolution as its scene, to merge

the personally creative struggle with a social convulsion of change.

Dickens revives his memory of *Zanoni* because he now feels the need to grapple with his pangs of consciousness in a related way. Inevitably he brings the method down to earth more than Bulwer, and to some extent changes the method of symbolic representations into one of dramatic realization. But the travail of his spirit appears in the extent to which the allegorical substratum intrudes and prevents a fully concrete character-projection.

Bulwer's attitude is far from that of Carlyle. With his odd kind of Tory anarchism he politically abhors the Revolution and tries consciously to reduce it to a demented terrorism. But in the working-out of his allegory he cannot help giving it further values, which in the end achieve something like a full acceptance of its action at deeper levels than those of intellectual judgment. For, if the Revolution is the moment when the creative process reaches its intensest moment of conflict and union (as *Zanoni* implies), then the schematic political attitude falls away and sets free a quite different conception, in which revolution and stability, death and life, are equally accepted as aspects of process.

Zanoni, the idealizing and integrating art-activity, is opposed to old Melnour, the contemplative and analytic mind. But both these figures are opposed in turn to Glyndon, emblem of art-science which strives to rise above convention and stereotype, but is stricken down by the attack of fear on the threshold of adventure into the unknown (the human future, the unconscious). Both Glyndon and *Zanoni* compete for possession of Viola (love, the affective life, union); and the spiritual drama of their struggles is linked throughout with the tumults and clashes of the Revolution. Bulwer, despite his hectic denunciations of the Terror, finds himself willynilly in the position of identifying the innermost struggle of human and artistic values with the struggle of basic social change.

His Viola is arrested in Paris at the height of the Terror (through the jealous hauntings of Nicot and Fillide). Glyndon, whose contact with her was the direct cause of her danger, has

fled; but Zanoni steps in and substitutes himself for her on the guillotine.

The derivation of *A Tale* from *Zanoni* is certain; for it appears both in method and theme. But in the years between 1842 and 1859, Dickens's mind has transmuted *Zanoni's* tensions and forms into something very different. The frankly and wildly symbolic tale has been rationalized and psychologized, but the undissolved structure is visible. Dickens like Bulwer wants to define the crucial moment of personal pang and growth in terms of the revolutionary situation and to find by these means the clue to human and artistic growth. In Bulwer the emblem of new life is the Child, in Dickens it is the United Lovers. In Bulwer Zanoni must sacrifice himself to save the new life, because the idealizing activity has gone too far and has lost human sympathy; and Glyndon must flee, because he is the artist who cannot break through his fear into a renewal of art and life. But the total effect of all the unions and cleavages, possessions and renunciations, is to liberate the creative image, to beget the child. Out of the revolutionary pangs of birth comes the continuity of life, the fresh stabilization of the life-process. Therefore Viola dies at the same moment as Zanoni sacrifices himself, and (as the book ends) the People come bursting with freedom into the prison, to find a dead mother and a helpless babe.

Even in the riot of their joy, they drew back in astonishment and awe. Never had they seen life so beautiful; and as they crept nearer, and with noiseless feet, they saw that the lips breathed not, that the repose was of marble, and the beauty and the ecstasy were of death. They gathered round in silence; and lo, at her feet there was a young infant, who, wakened by their tread, looked at them steadfastly, and with its rosy fingers played with its dead mother's arms.

The terrible moment of creation is ended. There is only the inbreaking movement of union and freedom, which meets a newlife apparently quite cut away from all parentage. But in the working-out of that newlife the struggle will revive, the innocence will become tainted, the freedom will reveal its limitations and tensions, and the struggle of process will start all over again. But not at the same level. The decisive moment

of death and renewal has given a fresh-start as well as re-established continuity.

In *A Tale*, with its less obvious allegory, and its more direct acceptance of social process, the romantic formulas of lovers-restored-to-one-another and the defeated-curse are used, and it is the rejected or excluded one who makes the sacrifice. But however differently the ingredients are mixed, the kinship of pattern remains; and a consideration of *Zanoni* helps us much further to an understanding of the passionate moment when Dickens felt that at last he could and must use the French Revolution as material and setting for a novel.

iii

It happens that we can go yet further and find the direct link between *Zanoni* and *A Tale*, the work which revived Dickens's memories of *Zanoni* at the time when he was moving near to his domestic collapse. This work is *The Dead Heart*, a play by a minor playwright and artist, Watts Phillips.

Watts Phillips had been trained by Cruikshank at the time when that artist was illustrating *Oliver Twist*; he studied in Paris and was present during the February Revolution of 1848, when, though his political understanding was slight, he felt much sympathy for the insurgents; he also knew Carlyle's *French Revolution* well. His play in part derived from an episode in Carlyle's book, which certainly lay also behind *A Tale*.

I have a knowledge (from my long residence) of the French *people*, and know the literature of the revolution *well*. My only borrowing was from an incident related in Carlyle's history (concluding chapter of third volume) in which an old man, the Marquis de something, answers to the roll-call in place of his son (who is asleep) and takes *his place in the tumbril*.

But memories of 1848 certainly gave the vivifying touch. In letters from Paris during the upheavals Watts Phillips wrote:

Glorious things are happening. Liberty *has* dawned on France. Hurrah . . .

I came home last evening over the Pont Neuf, and stopped for some minutes to look at the crowd of buildings (the Cité) which formed the gloomy masses that stretched along the river's banks—the faint and flickering lights that shone on the dark waters—the tall towers of the

various edifices, all so quiet and yet so grand in their indistinctness—when I was roughly disturbed in my meditations by crowds of fellows marching (from some banquet, I imagine) over the bridge and roaring the revolutionary songs. No sooner were they passed than a body of the Garde Mobile succeeded, their bayonets glistening in the moonlight.

The *Ca ira* still ringing in my ears, I walked on, musing upon the scene, which might have been an extract from the drama of the First Republic; and when I looked up—standing in the old Place de la Révolution—I almost expected to see the tall, gaunt form of the guillotine, showing black against the sky, and blasting, like the upas with its hideous aspect, the passers by.

And at least once he seems to have been in some danger.

He composed *The Dead Hand* some three years before *A Tale*, though it was not produced till the year of the novel's publication, 1859. Boucicault had made an adaptation of Dumas's *Chevalier de la Maison Rouge*, in which the Bastille and the revolutionary crowd had appeared; and thus was the probable reason for the delay in staging Watts Phillips's play. In April, 1859, *A Tale* began its instalments, and Watts Phillips was at once dismayed:

Of course they will make a play of Dickens's new tale, *The Two Cities*, and (if you have read it) you will see how the character of the man "dug out" of the Bastille will clash with the man in *The Dead Heart* written more than three years ago. . . . The tone of the resurrection from the Bastille ought to have been *fresh* in my play, not in his story. It's very heart-breaking. (2 June.)

As a result, a speedy effort was made to produce the play, which was first acted on 10th November, 1859. Then the final instalments of the novel turned out to have used the same denouement as *The Dead Heart*—the substitution of one man for another at the guillotine in an act of self-sacrifice.

A single theme may be used accidentally by novelists or playwrights; but when two main themes coincide and entwine (the resurrection from the living-death of the Bastille and the sacrificial death), it seems more than likely that there is some direct contact. The death-substitution theme was certainly floating about. Dickens had *Zanoni* in mind, and something of the sort might have been suggested by Dumas's play. The

motive had appeared also in a play *All for Her* by Palgrave Simpson and Merivale. It is the combination of this motive with that of return-to-life which is surprising.

And there seems little doubt that Dickens had heard of read *The Dead Heart* well before beginning *A Tale*. The biographer of Watts Phillips says:

The author, indeed, went so far as to say that the piece was 'seen by Dickens long ago'. It seems that when he first sent the piece to [the manager] Webster, the latter took it down to Brighton, and there read it to two or three friends, one of whom was the novelist.

This statement was never contradicted; and we may therefore assume that Dickens knew the play and had been moved by its conception, which he revived in his own form to express the crisis of change he felt in breaking with Kate.

What exactly then did he get from *The Dead Heart* which he did not get from Carlyle and Bulwer? The name itself gives a first clue. The Bastille is in some sort the Dead Heart, which must break open with new life and love. And when we look at the play itself, we find that its hero Robert Landry is exactly the figure we require as the halfway-house between Zanoni and Manette-Darnay-Carton. He begins as a hopeful young artist, is horribly changed by the hell of twenty years' imprisonment, returns to life, becomes a resolved revolutionary leader, cannot resolve his love-problem, and finds release from his inner contradictions by a redeeming death of sacrificial substitution. Here we meet the implications I have discussed of the *Zanoni*-theme, brought to a level of more manifest unity and providing the basis for the new splitting-up that Dickens carries out. Landry is Manette, Darnay and Carton all in one: the sufferer, the reborn, the accuser of social evil, the revolutionary leader, the rent lover, the hopelessly-divided romantic. Also, through the way in which for Watts Phillips, 1793 and 1848, are emotionally merged, we get the contemporary impact more obviously than in *A Tale*.

Through this play then we can underline the extent to which Manette, Darnay, and Carton are all one person, Dickens. Here, as in *Zanoni*, the emphasis is on the giving-way of the old before the claims of the new. The revolutionary moment breaks open, the contradictions which it has been

perpetuating against its own will are abruptly overcome, and only the new life remains. In *Zanoni* this theme was embodied in the symbol of the Babe. Here it comes out in the fact that Landry dies to restore to Catharine Duval her son: the play ends with Catharine embracing the son and learning the truth about Landry by looking through the window as he mounts the guillotine. (By a stage-device the prison-walls slid away and the guillotine appeared: thus the two aspects, death and renewal, were brought together.)

The romantic hero, at the end of his tether, gives way to the youth who regains his mother. The hero is barred away and must go to death. (Note that the lost wife-mother in the play chances to be a Kate.) Thus the *Zanoni*-theme is redefined in a more rationally-mature way, which is more assimilable to Dickens's own inner conflict. We see that the Manette-Darnay-Carton complex holds a father-son conflict, of the sort later to come out clearly in *Edwin Drood*. The romantic artist, perverted by suffering and yet turned into a strong revolutionary agent, finds his completion by making way for the young Baptiste. Dickens feels himself confronted by the younger generation, Wilkie Collins and Sala, who go easily into issues that are still baffling for him; and by the young girls, his daughters and their friends, and Ellen Ternan, who turn easily to the loves and laughs he has lost or never had. But he refuses to accept the *Zanoni*-solution, the Babe coming out of the cleft prison-stone or Baptiste finding his mother's bosom again in safety. He wants desperately to share in the new life. So he splits up the *Zanoni*-Landry figure, and gives to Manette the horror and rebirth, the rigid accusation and the revolutionary conscience, and to Darnay and Carton the entangled conflict of love. Then one half of him can lose, because the other half wins. Carton-Charles goes down and renounces, but Darnay-Dickens takes the girl and finds his place in society.

A Tale was dramatized, as Watts Phillips had feared, and the public saw the connection of the two stories:

The plays caught on, and their resemblance to each other attracted universal attention, society divided itself unto two factions—the Celestites and Dickensites, the Websterites and Phillipsites. Then

came accusations and recriminations as to coincidences and plagiarisms, and bad blood arose on both sides. (Coleman.)¹

iv

An examination then of the inner movement of symbolism in *A Tale* and the relation of the symbolism to kindred contemporary trends makes sufficiently clear the potency of the image that burst on Dickens in the midst of his personal crisis. The examination reveals important subtleties that have been ignored or explained away in the general movement of falsification which has held appalling sway (except for the rare comments of a few critics such as Bernard Shaw and Edmund Wilson) in the realm of Dickens 'criticism'. *A Tale* is not a great work, though like almost anything written by Dickens it has great elements; but when it is seriously approached, it turns out to be a work of high interest, yielding some essential clues to the workings of Dickens's mind and of creative symbolism in general.

¹ See *Watts Phillips : Artist and Playwright*, by E. Watts Phillips (1891), written after *The Dead Heart* had been successfully revived by Irving. Phillips was an attractive person of considerable intelligence and a quick witty draughtsman's eye. There were many points of similarity between his outlook and Dickens's. He too attacked the Victorian Sunday, loved Paris, wrote on a visit to the Morgue, respected French culture more than English-Victorian, and was fascinated by the London underworld. He wrote (1854-5) *The Wild Tribes of London*, describing the slum-folk.

TWO ECLOGUES FROM DONEGAL

MONK GIBBON

THE WOOD

YEAR after year the rooks have dwelt here, and season after season the herons have returned in spring and built their nests.

But now woodmen have come and a hundred of the best trees stretch their length down the steep hill, fallen amid the first shoots of the iris.

The rooks remain. Where should an army of five hundred go in this stark country? They make their nests in the swinging branches that are left and the wood echoes once more to their quarrels.

But when the herons come, who for so many years have sought the shelter of this place each spring, though their nests are spared they stay only three days and then depart.

Raucous army, whose wild manœuvres in the autumn sky, tumbling and wheeling and swerving, make you seem like the horsemen of heaven, at last you have won your point. How often have I seen you mob the grey bird in its slow flight and strive to drive it from its home? But that which your black anger could never accomplish has now been achieved by the sight of the destruction wrought by man.

NEIGHBOURS

FOR a good stretch of time now, for a whole season, for a year or more perhaps you have been my neighbours; you were a stone's throw from me; one might almost say you lived on my doorstep you were so near.

For once that I took the grassy track across the warren and saw where the flood tide had covered the close-cropped grass

at the head of the estuary, or for once that I went up the steep wood, pushing the dead bracken aside to clear the path, you must have gone the same way a dozen times and more. And yet I never spoke to you. I never shouted a greeting to you once.

If a man had told me that you were there I would have denied it: I would have called him a liar.

But now the trapper of rabbits has caught you, the sea-otter and the badger both; the one that must have stepped down many times to the water's edge at nightfall from the small copse of stunted hazel across the channel; and the other that he tells me was carrying her young.

Dark rascal that he is, he has finished the otter with a blow on the head from his ugly cudgel, and he has hung the dead badger, still in the trap, across a branch of the pine tree by the house, and truly I am ashamed at the sight; to think that we were neighbours for months past and I never knew it, and to think how poor a neighbour man makes to those whom he has it in his heart to destroy.

THE WHITE BLACKBIRD

BRYAN MacMAHON

IT was a bright morning in the silver spring. The invincible season had thrust its way into the very breast of the city. There were its pennants on every bush, bough, and branch of the little laughing park. The song of the birds, that only nostalgia has elevated into music, was tremulous in the renovated air. The people who were on the pathways showed a marked tendency to levitation: they had about them an air of premature, if brittle, jollity, which seemed to be highly infectious. In fine, St. Stephen's Green in Dublin was taut with the compressed excitement of the year's rebirth.

As the professor entered by the corner of the square park, he found himself invaded by the vernal excitement. He reckoned the invasion as transitory as it was intoxicating—soon he would have diagonally crossed the few acres of parkland. Afterwards his body would have been drained of this blue-green magic. Yet, he was determined to make the most of it while it lasted. So he tightened his elbow grip on the portfolio in his armpit, thrust his elegant but uncomfortable toe-cap gracefully forward, and widened the wings of his nostrils in a way that was deliriously male. This done, he refurbished his pride in his upstanding silver-wire hair: approved of his well-cut suit of clerical grey and gloried in his immaculate white shirt and right-red tie. He inflated his lungs, that—here he flicked out his wrist to glance at his wrist-watch—in precisely ten minutes, would serve him in excellent stead as he delivered his long-awaited lecture on several unusual aspects of pre-Christian culture. He glanced over the bushes to where the cupola of the Celtic Academy formed portion of the city skyline. Smiling confidently, he moved jauntily forward on the asphalt pathway.

As he came round a corner in the bushy pathway he saw before him a low-sized man peering steadfastly into the bushes. The man was wearing the clothes of a Dublin workman, com-

plete with the inevitable faded red scarf. His whole attitude as he crouched there was genuinely Sean O'Casey-ish. As the professor approached he saw a pink face complete with infant-blue eyes revolve upon the as-yet regardant shoulders. The face waited patiently until the professor was into the correct position to be addressed, whereupon the lips began in a gentle Dublin drawl.

'Hey, mister, would you like to see a white blackbird?'

'Certainly!' said the professor.

'Well,' said the bush-watcher, in slow didactic tones, 'You'll stand at one side of that bush and I'll stand at th' other. When I say "go" you'll strike the bush and out will fly a white blackbird.'

The professor stepped briskly on to the grass. He ventured a quick glance at his watch. His smile was eloquent: it said, 'Despite my hurry this morning, I am determined to demonstrate my indulgence.' As directed he stood at the other side of the bush, waited tolerantly for the signal, struck the bush once, twice, and then, sure enough, out floated a white blackbird! Or rather a black-and-white blackbird.

The professor's indulgence was altered immediately to agitation. 'Did you see it? Did you see it?' he frisked.

The man was thoughtful. 'Aye, I saw it,' he said.

'How did you know it was there?'

'Me! I make a study of white blackbirds.'

The professor looked penetratingly at the man. 'Tell me,' he said, 'as a matter of interest, how does one make a study of white blackbirds?'

'Well, I go into the Public Library and I search all the local papers from stem to stern to see would I find a mention of a white blackbird. Sometimes I go up to the canal at Portobello and chat for hours with the turf-men who come up in the barges. I have ways and means of finding out all about white blackbirds.'

'This is very interesting,' said the professor.

They walked forward together: the professor was pleased the man was going in his direction.

'A few weeks ago I got a letter from a place called Enfield in the County Meath. "Dear Mr. Byrnes," it said—that's me

name, Danny Byrnes—"I heard from Jackie Furlong the engine-driver on the railway, that you're a man who's interested in white blackbirds. Well, this is to inform you that there's a pair of white blackbirds in a wood near here, and if you'd travel down some Saturday morning I'd be delighted to show you where they are. Yours faithfully, Andy Delaney. P.S. They're a cock and a hen, so that there's a fair chance of their mating."'

'And did you travel down?' asked the professor.

'Aye, I travelled down all right.'

'And did you see the white blackbirds?'

'I saw one of them.'

'One of them?'

'Aye, only the cock. But I got another letter from Andy Delaney a few days ago. He said they've mated all right, and that there are five eggs in the nest. I was thinking of running down there some Saturday morning when the young ones are out.'

The two men were now at the main gate of the park. The professor was looking steadfastly at his watch as if to hold back the hands while he engaged this unusual man in conversation.

'And tell me, Mr. Byrnes,' he said, so that he should have no belated regrets, 'have you any other interests or pursuits except white blackbirds?'

'I have.'

'You have?'

'Aye, every night of me life, when me work is over, I sit before the fire from eight o'clock to half-past ten with one of two things—a book or an idea.'

The man made as if to walk away. He was going in the opposite direction to the professor. He made no attempt to lure the professor after him, yet his easy attitude was indicative of his certainty that the professor would follow. The professor looked around agonizingly as if seeking a clock a shade more partial to him than his watch. He looked across at the formidable façade of the Academy. Somewhere over his head a clock struck the hour, menacingly, absolutely, and irrevocably.

'An idea?' said the professor, striding forward until he was abreast of the man. 'What idea?' Danny Byrnes continued to walk on with the professor at his side.

'Ah, the whole world is reeking with ideas. All day long while I'm working in the timber-yard there's a never-ending torchlight procession of ideas marching through me brain. But I'm a cool class of a customer; I'm not like the greedy fish that takes a bite out of the first red worm that's dropped into the pool. Ah, no, I take me time and when I'm in the tram coming home from work, I go over me ideas slowly and carefully. Then I select the one that seems to be the most fertile. When eight o'clock comes, I sit on me chair in front of the fire and I worry away at the idea like a dog at a bone. People think I'm a lonely man living be meself and all that. But I'm anything but it. I might as well tell you that some of those ideas are a rare disappointment to me. They don't hold me jig-time—after a few minutes they fizzle out like a bottle of smoke.'

'The ones you find successful . . . could you . . . give me some idea what they're like?'

'Ah, well, it's hard to pick one out on the spur of the moment, as you might say. Over the years I've gone through a fair share of ideas.'

'Well,' said the professor, who was a shade crestfallen, 'you could give me rather a rough idea.'

'Let me see now. Well, the first one that comes into my mind is not typical, but it'll serve its purpose. It's manners.'

'Manners?'

'Yes, manners, etiquette and all the rest of it.'

'And, as a matter of interest, Mr. Byrnes, what are your views on manners? Do you believe in them?'

'I'm a firm believer in them. Manners are the lubricating oil on the piston rings of human relationships.'

The professor whipped out an old envelope and a pencil. He placed the envelope on the portfolio and began to write. The passers-by began to stare at him. Just then he recalled his abhorrence of the popular fallacy that eccentricity and scholarship go hand-in-hand. He put away his pencil and envelope and hastened after Byrnes. As he did so he spied an accusing

clock in the fanlight of an optician's shop. The time was seven minutes past the hour.

Byrnes was still speaking: 'A modicum of hypocrisy, in my opinion, is absolutely essential. Candour is not a virtue: it's a vice. An edict against manners would set civilization back a couple of thousand years. Manners are the track under the snail on the wall.'

'That's very good. Have you any more ideas like that?'

'Take gravity!'

'Well, what are your views on gravity?'

'It's a sobering thought that man, despite all his ingenuity, cannot, without the aid of mechanical contrivances, conquer gravity to the extent of more than, say, seven miserable feet. I never reckon a high jumper an athlete—I see him as a chosen hero of the human race who has thrown down the gauge of battle to the great enemy, gravity. Mind you, I've argued on the other side, too, and I'm firmly convinced that if man could jump proportionately, say, as high as a frog, the world would be a confounded nuisance of a place to be living in.'

The professor was smiling. They had come to a corner. To the right lay one of the meaner streets of the city. Byrnes turned to the professor, and asked suddenly:

'By the way, have you ever seen a Bandon Hood?'

'One of the hoods the old women wear in Bandon, is it?'

'Aye! Have you ever seen one of them?'

'No, but I've seen pictures of them.'

'Ah, sure, I've seen pictures of them myself.'

The professor was contrite. 'Are you disappointed in me?'

'Ah, no, when you're not in the way of those things you can't be expected to know all about them.'

'Like white blackbirds?'

'Aye, like white blackbirds.'

There was a pause. Byrnes looked up at the sky above the poor houses. 'Ah, the world is simply teeming with peculiar things, and life isn't half long enough for the consideration of them. Ah, God be good to me uncle who used put the ships in the bottles.'

The professor had been framing a valedictory phrase. His body had that elusive appearance that it assumes prior to

departure. 'Ships in bottles?' he gulped. Byrnes had made off down the poor street. The professor skipped lightly in his wake.

'Aye . . . with a long, long tweezers. He was up in Nome at the gold rush and he acted as a doctor to the Eskimos' reindeer. He'd make a ballad while a cat'd be licking his ear. He died in the workhouse in Boyle.' Byrnes cocked his head judicially. 'Some people'd call me uncle a terrible cultured man, but I say he only made proper use of the gifts that God gave him.'

'And what is that but culture?' commented the professor.

'I daresay you're right. Looking at it in your light I'd call me uncle a treasure-house of wisdom. He told me a thing about bananas that I've never forgotten'

'What was that?'

'He told me that bananas should be eaten with salt.'

'With salt?'

'Aye. He also said that if you're only whittling a stick you should do so with a method. He said that the Ten Commandments were aimed at a man's body as well as his soul. He said that you can see the first of death in a comrade's face only in a mirror. He said that if you knew a dog's master you could always see that man right in between the dog's two eyes. He said that he wasn't afraid of death because, seeing that he didn't remember being born, he wouldn't remember dying. He said that ash when 'twas green made a fire for a queen. He said that after a gatherer came another gatherer. He said that a hare was shyer than a sheep and he said that some people were born into the world with bog-deal faces.'

'Bog-deal faces? What did he mean by that?'

'I don't know—he just said it.'

'Do you remember anything else your uncle used to say?'

'He said thousands and thousands of things, but I can't recall the half of them. Ah, yes, he said that no one should begrudge the hearth its coal nor the candle its flame. He said that polished oak and brass were man and wife. He said that the sun was terribly impartial. He said that the loneliest questions in the world began with "Do you remember?" He said you could only hold looking at the field for five minutes, but that you could keep looking at the sea for ever. He said

that no two mackerel in the wide ocean had the same patterns on their skins. He said that when people were turning over the red earth a cure came up out of the clay, and he said that mankind had as many coats as an onion, and that when you stripped them all off you found . . . a gypsy.'

The professor suddenly discovered that he had arrived at a narrow street and had halted in front of a small house crouched between two tenements. This was obviously where Byrnes lived. The professor sighed, and shook his head as if he were clearing his brain of sleep. He looked acutely at Byrne and said:

'Tell me, were you born in Dublin?'

'I was.'

'And was your father born in Dublin?'

'He was.'

'Your grandfather—was he born in Dublin?'

'Ah, you have me there—he was born in Ringsend!'

The laughter that tumbled between the two men had a comradely ring. It seemed to set a decision in Byrnes. 'Here's me humble abode,' he said, indicating the crouching house, 'won't you step in for a moment or two?' Looking sharply at the professor, he said, 'I like your company.'

The professor considered the face of his watch with considerable tranquillity. 'Not to-day, Mr. Byrnes. Some other day perhaps. I'm very late as it is. But . . .'

Byrnes cocked his head quizzically. 'What is it?' he asked.

'Saturday morning next . . . will you be free?'

'I will.'

'What would you say to the proposal that the two of us run down to Enfield to see those white blackbirds? I have a car . . .'

Byrnes paused. He looked at the professor for a final keen appraisal. 'I'll go with you,' he said firmly.

The professor seemed immoderately pleased. 'That's a bargain,' he said. 'I'll pick you up here at 8.30 sharp. You won't forget?'

'Me forget! I never yet forgot anything connected with a white blackbird.'

Later when the professor mounted the rostrum, there was a

hush of disapproval on the hall. With a belligerent movement he threw his portfolio on to the table—it fell perilously close to the water carafe. The smooth fat chairman was making a conciliatory birdcage with his fingers. Then he rose and made a joke that failed to raise the faintest titter in the hall. When the chairman was seated, the professor began confidently, sweeping the hall fairly with defiant eyes:

‘Fellow members of the Celtic Academy, those among you who have been self-righteously awaiting a humble apology for my lack of punctuality this morning are doomed to grave disappointment.’ There was a pause in which it seemed that every ear in the hall had become elongated in elfin fashion. ‘As you are aware, I had proposed speaking to you to-day on some unusual aspects of pre-Christian culture in this country. I have changed my mind. This morning a chance encounter has forced me to the ineluctable conclusion that ornament or weapon or utensil of brass, bronze, copper, iron, or gold, no matter how cunningly wrought or functionally or artistically perfect it may be, is as nothing compared with the ramifications of the mind of man. For with every remove from the human mind so richly dowered by the Creator—whether that remove be through axe or chisel, or brush or pen—a portion of the eternal quicksilver beauty of the world leaks away and is lost for ever. I vehemently submit for your approval the proposition that the mind of *homo sapiens*, while he is yet erect, vibrant, sentient, and sapient, is worth a wilderness of prehistoric pots and pans.’

The professor looked around with terrifying truculence. Then, after the merest ghost of a smile had crossed his lips, he continued:

‘And in token of which assertion, here and now I propose telling you the story of the White Blackbird.’

THE THEATRE

HENRY VIII. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE and JOHN FLETCHER.

Directed by TYRONE GUTHRIE. Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

CYMBELINE. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. Directed by MICHAEL BENTHALL. Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM. GEORGE FARQUHAR. Directed by JOHN CLEMENTS. Phoenix and Lyric Theatres, London.

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING. CHRISTOPHER FRY. Directed by JOHN GIELGUD. Globe Theatre, London.

THE scheme of the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford postulates a certain number of plays each season, and the size of the theatre demands a certain scale of presentation. The two are hard to reconcile. Most of us who care for Shakespeare would like to see, rather than not see at all, his plays brilliantly acted in simple production. Simplicity is hard to achieve at the Memorial, a playhouse which, as far as I can see, gives maximum trouble to the actors at minimum effect upon the audience. Moreover, its theatre, being Memorial, has its cachet and however effective a cheap production may be, there will not be lacking those who say that kind of production is not good enough.

If, on the other hand, you have one that is—meaning, unfortunately, not necessarily good enough for the author, but 'good enough' to compare with and outshine other productions, then where are you? You are up against the fact that six productions are staged in the course of a season, none of which can have much more than fifty performances, and a 'run' of that amount would anywhere else be judged a 'flop'.

Once we come on to runs, we come up against the question of acting. To be a star at Stratford has its points. Between April and October one can either shine in parts one has made famous elsewhere or appear in roles to which one has always aspired but from which the exigencies of a career has debarred one.

To be a beginner at Stratford also has its points. Like one's

elders, one is before the public for six months of a year, in a theatre well known and much watched. One has practice, a plenitude of parts, and even if they are mainly of the 'What ho, my lord! What, I my lord?' variety, one has the chance of shining in reflected glory.

Shakespeare however did not write only for stars and supers. He wrote many parts which, though small, demand as expert playing in their way as do the star parts. To-day, those small parts are apt to be given to 'small' actors, which is not quite the same, and to make up for that, 'big' parts are often given to them as well.

The stars at Stratford do their best, and that is often a very good best. But those who have it not in them to be leading players, seem to me to suffer from secondary roles and the ardours of many rehearsals under different producers. The answer may be that the producers should inspire them. At Stratford this year the producers have not been on the whole inspiring, and one wonders if that is because of the acting material with which they had to deal, or of their own methods, which seemed to concentrate more on production than on performance.

I mention these matters because the season began with high hopes engendered from last year, and these have noticeably diminished with each succeeding production. *Macbeth* disappointed. John Gielgud retrieved matters with his *Much Ado About Nothing*, a production which was a Festival in itself and, unlike certain other productions, a festival in honour of the man who wrote it, and not a show-off of the man who happened to be directing it. This has resulted in Mr. Gielgud being due to appear, both as director and actor, next season at Stratford. Meanwhile, we have had the rest of this year's to contend with—and I use the verb advisedly. We had *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. If you can have a *Macbeth* which does not appal, you can I suppose have a *Midsummer Night's Dream* without poetry, though I don't see why you should. It was followed by *Cymbeline*, rich both for its poetry and for the character of Imogen, and by *Henry VIII*. Both these plays are rarely done—I last saw each of them more than twenty years ago—have the interest of disputed or

'part' authorship, and both present problems to the producer, *Henry VIII* with its three climaxes, its promise of a tragedy, and its abrupt change of mood to rejoicing, *Cymbeline* with that last scene itself containing the material for a whole play.

Mr. Guthrie made *Henry VIII* a good show, but that is about all he did do; the nuances of character and the play's general conception seemed to have escaped him. Moreover, he seemed so ill at ease with the theme of kingship, which is what the play is 'about', that he sought to overlay it with 'business'. Some of this was omitted after the first night, but even so, in mid-July, there remained a custard pie, thrown by the crowd at the porters in scene four of the last act; there was much unnecessary scuffling among the scribes, all to take one's mind off that unpardonable intrusion in a Shakespeare play, the text. The clerics were 'characterized' with comic make-up and at the opening of Act V, the Bishop of Winchester was represented as being drunk, reeling drunk, on the night of Elizabeth's birth. His words, after asking the time, are

'These should be hours for necessities,
Not for delights; times to repair our nature
With comforting repose, and not for us
To waste these times.'

They do not seem to me to imply a marked degree of alcoholism. Within the limits imposed by the direction, Diana Wynyard was a dignified Katharine, though rather more petulant than austere. Mr. Guthrie was pleased to treat her last appearance as a death-scene. He cut the vision but interpolated a line into her speech, for in no text at my disposition do I find her request a footstool. Anthony Quayle, as Henry, on the whole managed to suggest rather than imitate the Holbein portrait, but was unable to give more than indications of three differing ways in which the role might be played. Harry Andrews consistently held one as Wolsey; it was a good performance in a production wherein performances had no chance to be more than that, and he was not helped by having to deliver his farewell sitting on the floor. It is a trick of which modern producers are fond, but I do not myself think that Cardinals are in the habit of

sitting about on the stone floors of palaces. Leon Quartermaine, as Buckingham, was made up to resemble Charles I, which must have confused those sections of the audience, foreign and otherwise, not too familiar with English history, and the Coronation procession was cut. The piece was played against a permanent set, of which a great staircase running diagonally upstage from the right was the main feature. Henry's throne remained on-stage throughout, whether we were meant to be at Kimbolton or Hampton Court, and Wolsey made most of his entrances from the orchestra pit, which gave the impression that he lived in the cellar. Emphasis was laid on pageantry, and Tanya Moisewitsch designed elaborate colour schemes; they did not seem to me to have the spirit of Tudor colouring, and it is the essence of this play that it is Tudor. I felt it particularly unfortunate that she dressed Henry in yellow for his wedding to Anne Bullen, when it is so generally known that was the colour he wore when she was beheaded. The heraldry was unconvincing and as the bishops spent a good deal of time with their backs to the audience, it was a pity the lighting showed their copes to be of canvas. Also I thought I saw zip-fasteners on the ladies' dresses.

It remains to be added that the production had speed, colour, freshness and, frequently, drama. It held attention throughout, though it shocked it by being conceived so at variance with the text. The producer of *Cymbeline* was Michael Benthall, and Mr. Benthall's methods are best illustrated by his own description of them in *Orpheus* (A Symposium of the Arts, John Lehmann, 12s. 6d.). He tells there how, in 1944, he and Tyrone Guthrie dressed *Hamlet* in doublet and hose.

'What this "fancy-dress" style of production loses, however, is the essential realism of the play and its truth for the present time.'

(Realism, indeed!) In 1948, for a production of *Hamlet* at Stratford, he therefore

'selected finally a period near enough to our own to heighten the play's realism (that word again! is "reality" meant?) and yet far enough distant to give scope for that picturesque romanticism

modern life has largely destroyed. I chose a period—the mid nineteenth-century—and I set the play in a mid-European Court where the juxtaposition of crinolines, uniforms and evening and levée clothes could create the atmosphere of colour and royalty associated with the period. I hoped in this way to retain the grandeur of the tragedy without destroying the play's vital contemporary relevance.'

I myself do not see that a Mid-European Court at any period is relevant to Hamlet, which is set in a Nordic one, and the result, as I saw it last year, seemed to me tawdry.

For *Cymbeline*, Mr. Benthall concentrated on the fairy-tale aspect, with much swirling of stage-filling cloaks and the introduction of several new characters—a dwarf and a couple of witches for the Queen, as whom Wynne Clark was able to out-ham even her Old Lady in *Henry VIII*. Leslie Hurrey designed a permanent set, touching skilfully on the idea of a Britain 'liberated' from invasion. This resulted in ruins of Roman amphitheatres, which were all very well, though Mr. Hurrey's fondness for a flowing yet crumbling line gave the impression of grey marzipan at which mice had been nibbling. Unfortunately, however, Shakespeare gives a precise and striking description of Imogen's bedchamber, and when Iachimo delivered this, we knew he was lying, as he had, in Mr. Hurrey's set, seen nothing of the kind. Once again, a sad instance of the poet's text interfering with, in this instance, a designer's ideas! Iachimo was played by John Slater as a sort of burlesque villain, but vigorously played. Cloten, pronounced to rhyme with 'cotton', was presented as a clown-Caliban, but halfway through William Squire remembered Kean and came to life; so did the audience. The Imogen was Kathleen Michael, who had already been Titania. Unfortunately, Miss Michael is far from being a poetic actress and an Imogen without poetry is an insult. The Posthumus of Clement McCall added injury to this by manifesting bewilderment, in voice and face, that he was supposed to be speaking verse, which he accordingly chopped up on the shout-and-swallow principle. This piece of casting made the final scenes even more improbable—yet, rightly approached, how brilliantly contrived they are, and how discouraging that those concerned gave no indication of knowing 'Q's

helpful analysis of the twenty-four dénouements. A production of *Cymbeline* should build up to these; this one petered out, mainly because Mr. Benthall's method, as shown in *The Wild Duck*, proffers insufficient help to his actors, though it provides grouping and pictures; but pictures, however pretty, do not make a play, especially when that play is full of poetry, ritual and mystery.

The revival of Farquhar's comedy, at the Phoenix, subsequently transferred to the Lyric, is cheerful and capably acted. Kay Hammond's form of delivery destroys most of the rhythms of Farquhar's prose and occasionally makes the sense hard to follow, but it is an industrious impersonation. The Aimwell and Archer are Robert Eddison and John Clements, and Gwen Cherrell does well as Cherry. I felt that the furnishing of Lady Bountiful's house was a little in advance of the times, and the production veered rather uncertainly towards stylization—which meant that, having not done justice to formal periods, the players would prance off formally in semi-minuet or goose-step with candles in a way beloved by Nigel Playfair but disastrous to clothes. Despite this tendency to regarding the eighteenth-century as 'quaint' little drastic damage was done (though the text was slightly tampered with and *The Trifle* was cut), and one must be grateful for being able to see again this always fresh comedy.

At the Globe, one can be further grateful for a graceful production of Christopher Fry's consistently entertaining verse-comedy. As a play, *The Lady's Not For Burning* is, perhaps, no great matter and the 'slap-up' production which John Gielgud has given it, elegantly assisted by Oliver Messel, perhaps, by its spaciousness, accentuates the slowness. But that is a fault on the right side; we want no hole-and-corner production for such joyousness of witty but cultivated intelligence as our theatre sorely needs and the rising, literally, of this standard in the West End, where *Daphne Laureola* has already shown the delights to be found in words richly used, sentences-of-one-word school of snip-snap. When the curtain rises at the Globe, words of such colour and elastic caprice fly out that the auditorium seems full of the flash of kingfishers'

wings. The words are as vivid as that, and in their conjunction, as rare; the kingfisher is a bird not often seen.

An ordinary West End audience had, heard, uneasily, that the play is in verse—which it often isn't, 'sliced prose' being its author's description, though it touches poetry. That audience found its ribs tickled in less than five minutes.

'I travel light; as light
That is, as a man can travel who will
Still carry his body around because
Of its sentimental value.'

After the ribs were tickled, the lips relaxed. The audience could smile, despite verse! It could laugh. Soon it realized that the rib-tickling was but a trick, to gain attention, and this added to the pleasure, for the poet was seen as practised playwright. To do this, in a West End theatre, in a hot summer, was a feat, and one from which, it is devoutly to be hoped, other poets will also gain. The ripples of laughter swell to a stream; the kingfishers fly over the laughter, and all this done by words. Perhaps they fly out too swiftly, perhaps there are too many of them; one emerges, not used to this, a little bemused, buffeted and blinded in a way that makes one afterwards put on sterner spectacles than the occasion demands. Mr. Fry must forgive me if I do now, but he has faults and they, being the corollary of those gifts which invite applause, deserve criticism. I venture to criticize first, so as to conclude thankfully.

First, the title. A lady, suspected of being a witch, resents burning. Mr. Fry disarms us from taking this seriously by setting his play in 'the fifteenth century either more or less exactly'. It is a blind spot on my vision, but both witchcraft and burning are things I have to take seriously. Admittedly, the play does not ask us to, and indeed scintillates so much that we may forget that. Nevertheless, the title—the lady's not for burning—by bringing in that word 'burning' induces an uneasiness which is not the play's purpose and is therefore cheating. '*No witch, this woman,*' though untrue, since she bewitches right and left, would have been fairer, though vulgar. *The Soldier's Not For Living* would have been truer,

but less good 'theatre' and Mr. Fry knows his theatre; he gets an early laugh by mentioning privy; another one, reminiscent of Wilde, is 'I wasn't born, I was come across', and there are times when a rather determined attempt to be plain-speaking results in *loucheness* rather than bawdry.

One of the refreshing virtues of his gift for words is alertness against the misuse of them. When someone is praised for doing a thing single-handed, the reply is 'Why can't he use both hands?' Easy, perhaps, but so is breaking cobwebs; save that most of us don't, we get enmeshed in them instead. When the witch flees she 'takes to my toes'. We all do, when we run—though the phrase is 'heels'. This being so, this fastidiousness should not be let down by

'One day, I shall burst my bud
Of calm, and blossom into hysteria.'

A bud can only blossom into what it is, and hysteria is no blossom; it's a canker. Sometimes the poetry is uneasy. The Lady speaks—

'I live alone, preferring loneliness
To the companionable suffocation of an aunt.
I still amuse myself with simple experiments
In my father's laboratory. Also I speak
French to my poodle. Then you must know
I have a peacock which on Sundays
Dines with me indoors.'

The lady, who's not for burning, is called Jennet, an uneasy echo. And her surname is Jourdemayne, which I take to mean that she is ahead of her time. She is made to say that 'They say I have changed a man into a dog. But it isn't a dog at all, it's a bitch'—with fleas. And then—

'You can't believe—oh, surely not,
When the centuries of the world are piled so high—
You'll not believe what, in their innocence,
These old incredulous children in the street
Imagine of me?'

Then there is Alison, the girl who is not a witch, but is all for burning in love's sacramental fires—for this is a serious play; how else could it be a comedy? Alison, perfectly heralded

by the soldier (John Gielgud) as 'walking through the garden beside a substantial nun'—note not only the adjective, but 'beside' rather than 'with'—Alison dismayed me with her images, which were an abandonment rather than an abundance.

'Such white doves were paddling in the sunshine
And the trees were as bright as a shower of broken glass.'

That is enough. That is more than enough. Trees have been stated as if only I—each one of us—had ever seen them. But—

'Out there, in the sparkling air the sun and the rain
Clash together like the cymbals clashing
When David did his dance.'

There is no need for that; we don't need that deliberate Auden let-down of 'did'. Then,

'I've an April blindness.
You're hidden in a cloud of crimson catherine wheels.'

In other words, she doesn't know what she is talking about, and that may be the point. But everyone else is talking so hard, she ought to be a rest in peace. As she is, later—

'But whenever my thoughts are cold and I lay them
Against Richard's name, they seem to rest
On the warm ground'—

that is enough, but we have more

'where summer sits,
As golden as a humblebee.'

It is when we come to Alison that I cease criticizing; she is delightful. She is played by Claire Bloom, who was at Stratford last year, and I wonder, in view of Titania and Imogen, why they ever let her go. Dressed graciously by Oliver Messel, she is matched equally by Richard Burton, a young actor whose performance in this play will lead him, presumably to be cast, as Romeo. I see him rather as Henry, later, much later, as Orlando. He is very good indeed, with a cleanness, shared by Claire Bloom, that should augur well for the great roles. I have no room here to quote their love-scene—the play is available at 6s. from the Oxford University

Press. I wish, moreover, to give some indication of another aspect of the play's quality—the love scene of the soldier, who wants to die, with the woman who doesn't—the woman who, trapped in men's official wiles, uses her own to trap the man beyond all wiles, save her own. He says

'Now that I'm down
On my knees, I may as well stay here. In the name
Of all who were ever drowned at sea, don't weep!
I never learnt to swim. God keep you
From being my Hellespont.'

To which Jennet Jourdemayne (Pamela Brown) responds:

'What I do
With my own tears is for me to decide.'

Which may read very gay, but leaves out the effect it has on the audience of making them ready, through clichés, to listen. One listens the more readily to Mr. Gielgud's performance because of a good, unsparing and infectious quality about it. There is, in general, rather too much talk of April, we are occasionally forced to remember that when a greater poet created spring he did not leave out the snakes and lions, or the bitter songs of Arden. The April atmosphere must not be overdone; Mr. Fry has said good-bye to forty. Summer ought to follow—a season less spectacular than spring, however long delayed, and one of which not only the soldier's words give hint but also those of the Chaplain, so beautifully played by Eliot Makeham.

'I know I am not
A practical person, legal matters and so forth
Are Greek to me, except, of course,
That I understand Greek.'

Mr. Fry has enabled, through admittedly a number of tricks and a basically trite conception, ordinary London audiences to understand what they had previously thought was Greek to them—modern verse.

ROBERT HERRING.

THE MYSTERY OF THE STRAW DUMMY

From the novel *The Road to Klockrike Vagen ill Klockrike* by

HARRY MARTINSON

(Translated from the Swedish by Alan Blair)

THE road led through forest land with no near-by farms, and to the right of it ran the main railway-line, mile after mile: it seemed as desolate as the road. Every other hour or so Bolle came to a yellow-painted station with the air of being meant only for long-distance trains. He went into the waiting-room of one of them and had a drink of water, and when he had drunk his fill he walked round looking at the time-tables and maps. The railway-map was a pale phenomenon which gave a chlorotic picture of this huge land with its tilled fields, thundering waterfalls, dark forests, and blue mountains, and when Bolle had studied it he went up on to the high-road again, which continued to follow the railway. The desolation persisted, but he could now see a lake gleaming between the trees, and when he came to a large clearing in the forest which bared the rising ground and left an unobstructed view, there lay the lake in all its length like a drawn sword. On the other side of the lake extended a rich and variegated tract of land, gay as a patchwork quilt, and thickly dotted with clusters of houses, villages, and farms. A couple of churches pointed up into the sky like two white fingers, as though to say: not of this world. As Bolle stood there looking out over the water, he remembered having been there before, and that the lake was called Långflommen. On this side of the lake the land was not cultivated at all, save for an occasional crofter's cottage. He found a little forest-path, and began to follow it, thinking it might lead to such a cottage, but after sloping down for a bit the path began to lead round the edge of a swamp, twisting again after a while into a low-lying fir-wood, which almost

immediately gave way to swampy ground again. Here a number of pines were growing which life had never treated kindly, but there were also masses of bog-myrtle and bilberry which seemed very pleased with their lot.

Bolle rubbed one or two sprigs of bog-myrtle between his fingers and drank in the scent; bog-myrtle was something he never ceased to fall in love with all over again. He was a loyal and attentive cavalier of scents; it was something he still kept from the time when he used to make cigars, and ever since descending to the life of a professional tramp he had continued to cultivate this passion for sweet and pithy scents. And what scents were there that this great and fruitful earth could not provide, with all its manifold varieties of plants. Animals and men seldom smelt nice unless they were constantly scrubbed and washed. Foxes were no better than skunks, and cats always smelt of rats. Dogs had a stifling animal smell, and horses one of ammonia. One put up with these smells, true enough, one even got quite accustomed to them; but nothing could compare with the scents of plants at their best. It was as if, through them, one came into contact with the earth itself in quite a different way, and the idea was never far from him that the scents were the plants' thoughts. He was sure that even the inodorous plants had a scent, it was just that it was too delicate for human beings to perceive. But of all scented plants there was hardly one that could compete with bog-myrtle. And besides, it signified so much, it contained so much that was beautiful for one's thoughts to think. It was tender yet not tender, intimate yet remote, staunch but wild.

The path swerved again into a small fir-wood, immediately beyond which the lakeshore opened out, and Bolle found himself beside Långflommen.

He hung out his clothes to air on some bushes near by, and changed the bog-myrtle leaves in his shoes, which were good for tender feet. Placing his shoes on a stone, he took a piece of soap out of a tin box and waded slowly out among the rushes, where he proceeded to wash himself.

Bolle, too, had his nickname among the other tramps. He was called the Washing-Bear, as he was never able to see an ice-free lake without washing in it. It was part of his scent-

programme to visit lakes. But the water now was beginning to get rather cold with the time of year, and he didn't linger over his washing. Summer was already merging into September, and he could feel that Långflommen was not a particularly warm lake just now. A little further along the shore was a tumbledown old boathouse, and he ran there and back at the double to get his circulation going. As he looked out across the lake a boat came into view, and by the time he was dressed he heard the creaking complaint of a rowlock quite near by. The next minute a rowing-boat pushed its way in among the dense reeds and rushes.

Bolle's first thought was to call out to the two people in the boat and ask them if there was anywhere near by where he could go and ask for some food, but the same instant he saw something that made him crouch down quickly behind the bilberry bushes.

What he had seen could scarcely be true, and to convince himself that he had simply made a mistake, he crept forward to a spot among the bushes where he could hide and watch the boat unseen.

There were two people in the craft, a man at the oars, and on the after thwart a beautifully dressed woman—exceptionally well dressed in fact. She was evidently on her way somewhere, perhaps to the railway station, and had had herself rowed over the lake. That is to say, it had appeared so up to the second when Bolle suddenly crouched down behind the bushes. It had struck him in a flash that the woman sitting on the after thwart was altogether too stiff and rigid. She seemed far too stationary and propped up in her bearing, and at the same time the way she held her head gave Bolle the impression that she had no will of her own, or was even unconscious. Her neck was bent and the face turned downwards as though she were sitting there asleep, or as though she were dead.

The man now stood up in the boat and looked carefully round, as if to reassure himself that he was not being watched. He then bent down and, taking hold of the rigid body under the arms, lifted the woman up.

Bolle now saw something that made his eyes start out of his head, and he wondered with a shudder what kind of spectacle

this was that he^f was witnessing. The woman who had been sitting in the stern and whom the man had rowed across the lake was no living person, nor was she dead or unconscious. No, the woman the man was now holding under the arms and raising to a standing position was a large straw dummy as big as a full-grown woman, and dressed in a woman's best clothes.

It was the beautiful clothes in particular that were responsible for Bolle's curious frame of mind. He had never before seen such lovely clothes on a (rag- or) straw dummy. He had seen equally big straw dummies before, but only stuck in the middle of a field, or in an orchard among the cherry trees, and dressed in rags like the tramps in the comic papers. They were the picture of masculine decay. This big straw dummy, however, was something different. She was decked out in the prettiest clothes one could hope to see on a woman, dressed to appear superior, beautiful and alluring, not in the last stages of dilapidation. She was no scarecrow, but an immaculately dressed lady. As the man lifted her up two pieces of wood fell down on to the thwart. The straw dummy had been propped up, but not its head, and while being rowed across the lake this had wobbled forward more and more, which accounted for her dead, unconscious or sleeping appearance.

The man now helped her to her feet, exactly in the same way as one politely assists a lady, supporting her so that she won't slip, fall, or soil her nice clothes. The man lifted the dummy ashore over the rushes in the same way one lifts a real woman: one takes as long as possible, it may be the only chance one will ever have of really holding a woman, of sensing the perfume of her clothes, perhaps of lightly touching her soft cheek with one's own and feeling the intoxicating warmth of her body flow through one's hands in waves.

And although it was only a straw dummy the man was now lifting out of the boat, he held her aloft for so long, and pressed his face so near hers, that he seemed to want to cling with all his senses to her perfume and her pretty clothes. At the same time he seemed to avoid looking at her face, for he knew that it was a face of straw.

The straw dummy's head nodded forward again, and the

broad-brimmed hat, stuck through with a long hat-pin, hid her face of straw like a beautiful shade.

Finally he set her down on the ground, and put one arm round her supple body where the white blouse with its leg-of-mutton sleeves joined the blue bell-skirt beneath a broad red sash that encircled her waist. With the other hand he grasped the chain and dragged the boat up after him until it grounded sufficiently on the sand not to drift out into the lake. Then he carried the straw dummy, upright at his side, away between the trees and the bog-myrtle, and the incongruous pair disappeared along the same path that had led Bolle down to the lakeshore.

For some time Bolle sat silent and motionless. He felt horribly ill at ease, and dared not get to his feet, though the evening mist had come down and the ground where he lay began to feel chilly. He heard crackling noises from up in the forest as though someone were trampling on dry branches. The man was evidently trying to rid himself of that dummy, perhaps piling twigs and brushwood on top of it to hide it. For a while Bolle heard crackling, crunching, and rustling, and then all was silent. The man seemed to have gone away.

Bolle went and sat down by the little boat-house a bare stone's throw away. The boat-house was dryly situated and rested on four low corner-stones, and he found that he could creep in under one side. He crawled in and found that he could remain there unseen, but still have an unobstructed view towards the boat.

As he sat there keeping a look-out, he began to nod, then dropped off to sleep. He had walked a long way that day, and had had nothing to eat. How long he had been asleep he didn't know, when he awoke with a start from a loud noise coming from the direction of the boat close by. It was the man who had been rowing the straw dummy, he had now returned and was in the act of pushing the boat out. But just as he was about to climb into it he checked himself as though he had forgotten something. The same instant he had dragged it ashore again and oh horror! came running at top speed towards the boat-house where Bolle lay.

Bolle had no idea afterwards how quickly he managed to

slink out from under the boat-house, scramble to his feet, and take to his heels. There are times when instinct functions faster than anything that can be measured by time, taking charge of a person long before thought has a chance to give the command.

He ran for dear life, and the unknown man pursued him among the bushes. Sometimes he seemed to be gaining on him, but on each occasion terror gave the fugitive added strength, while the other man in the same degree appeared confused by the uncertainty of who it was he was pursuing, whether it was someone from the neighbourhood or a total stranger.

Finally the pursuer gave up and returned by degrees to the boat, having first rummaged about carefully with a torch on the ground underneath the boat-house where Bolle had been lying.

When Bolle, a long way from his pursuer, had managed to overcome his shortness of breath and the violent palpitation of his heart sufficiently to hear anything at all, he heard to his relief that the man had again begun seeing to the boat. But now he didn't seem to be shoving it out, Bolle thought rather that the boat was being dragged further up. And once again he heard footsteps receding up into the forest.

It had got so dark now that Bolle need no longer fear further pursuit. He therefore crept down nearer the boat, and settled himself in some bushes just inside the wood.

It was not long before the man came back, and although it had got much darker, Bolle could see that the straw dummy had come back too. But now the man was trailing it behind him, holding it under one arm and walking quickly down to the shore. When he reached the boat he slung the dummy roughly into it, pushed it out and climbed in. He immediately began rowing and gradually disappeared across the lake in the dark.

Bolle remained where he was until he could hear the splash of oars and the creaking of rowlocks no longer, then he began looking round for somewhere to sleep. He went back up the forest path, and continued along it until he found a small barn well hidden away in a little clearing, where there was no fear of his unknown pursuer coming, at least not that night.

It was a long time before Bolle could get to sleep, partly because he had slept for a while under the boat-house, and partly because he had been so unnerved by recently having had to flee for his life, that it seemed probable he would remain wide awake for the rest of the night. But however sleepy he had been, the thoughts revolving round the sight of the man with the straw dummy would have pursued him.

Time and again he recalled the strange sight to his mind and scrutinized the extraordinary occurrence minute by minute. He reminded himself of the way the straw dummy had been dressed—no one could have believed that it was only a straw dummy. There seemed to him to have been something premeditated about the whole business, and it was clear that whoever had rowed this elegantly dressed straw dummy across the lake must have done so with some purpose in view.

He tried to puzzle out some kind of explanation for the phenomenon, but try as he might, he could not hit on any theory that did not seem crazy or bizarre. Finally he stopped at the supposition that the man in the boat must have been a drunkard who had been seized by some curious fancy that made him want to show off in front of some observer: stage this performance so that people would think he really was out rowing on the lake with a beautiful woman. With a suitable distance between observer and boat no one could possibly doubt that there really was a beautiful and distinguished lady sitting in the stern. And to be able to row round with a beautiful and elegantly attired lady in a boat on a lake in August was a privilege that most men dreamed of, and which was always worth exhibiting to anyone.

Why, it was doubtful if that man was made who wouldn't turn green with envy when he saw such a sight from the shore on an August evening just before the twilight deepened and the moon rose.

So the whole thing at once seemed capable of explanation, and the sight he had seen not especially mysterious, even though it had appeared so at his first astonished glance. People were nearly always play-acting with something or other, and particularly with their longings, disappointments, and dreams. They loved to appear every conceivable thing

that they were not. And there was nothing much to be said about it, for in everyday life no one could be anything other than what reality allowed, and often that wasn't very much.

That is why people were so fond of play-acting. Not particularly good play-acting, but at least taking part in scenes. The only people who could view reality as anything other than play-acting were the real actors and actresses, for only they on the stage could portray men and women as they might be if they didn't play-act.

But the scene in the boat with the straw woman was play-acting, that became more and more clear to him.

The only thing he still thought of in connection with the straw dummy was the pretty clothes.

That part of the whole sorry play struck him as being rather far-fetched. Though perhaps not, after all. No, not in the least, really. For it was the only way to make the others green.

Bolle gnawed away at his reserve provisions, a small piece of horse-meat, dried up and tough as leather. Then he foraged round in the hay and picked all the thistles out of the spot where he was going to lie. There were always a lot of thistles in this marshland hay, and he took them carefully between finger and thumb and tossed them away from him through the soft darkness of the barn, then lay down gingerly to test his bed and see that there were no thistles left. Then he sniffed at the hay, which smelt of mint and cummin, and when he had grown used to the scents so that his sense of smell was completely satiated and he hardly noticed them, he curled up and fell peacefully asleep, no longer hunted by the thoughts of the straw dummy.

Three years were to pass before he found out about the drama of Långflommen, but it was a story which, to his relief, did not concern tramps and which lay outside their world.

NOCTURNE

PELLE FRITZ-CRONE

(*Translated from the Swedish by Alar Blair*)

IT is long ago, and memory is a frail story-teller with tired gestures and pallid words which have even lost their meaning. His words are an insipid drink, which has neither taste nor power to quench one's thirst. And to the eyes his painting is merely a blank surface. He could relate so much that is beautiful, but perhaps for that very reason it cannot be told. Memory is an old, old man, a wandering Ahasuerus with stories in his scrip. He inspires veneration, not by what he says or does, but by reason of what he is and what he inwardly depicts.

Yes, it is long ago now, and the old man's face has a network of wrinkles, coarse and fine: as though the ramifications of a river-bed, once furrowed by the torrent, had now dried up: one large river that has followed the mountain-ridge of the nose down to the estuary of the mouth, and other smaller ones which have poured over the level ground of the cheeks in tepid, salty rivulets. In his attempts at narrative he is unable to find the words, he begins to falter and shrugs his shoulders helplessly. But it is his very helplessness, that discloses what he wants to say, and he thereby makes himself known. His poor words are a divining-rod that bends down to hidden streams, and his helplessness is the salt-drenched fragrance of a wood foretoking the sea that lies beyond. He feels more keenly than you his disability to retell what he has seen and heard. But you are happy notwithstanding, because you know.

When he opens a book for you with trembling hands, when he points with his finger to well-worn lines, when he conjures something up for you as it used to be—a flower that has never withered, a moment in time that has stood still, or a word which has been uttered only once—you lay your hand over his eyes and a finger on his mouth and bid him be silent. For it is not he—behind him speaks the eternal one, he whom you hear

and who conjures up enchantment for you. His words are like a glistening stone in the water, down there on the bottom, the one which Old Man Memory took up in his hand and which grew smaller as it was taken out of the silent, eternal water's magnifying glass. You heard the words of the eternal one in the twilight amid the growing trees, as the horizon faded from your sight—the eternal one, who is in memory and memory's shadow, of whom memory itself is the shadow. His was the hand that was laid over time, that bid earth, trees, and words be what they once were. You remember this, don't you—the seat that is still warm from two people; the flower that is still fragrant; and the meeting of two hands, like a bird's soft body, and the arms' heavy wings that never had the strength to rise. That is how it was again, but tearless and immense, as when the links of continuity have melted in the cleansing fire of genesis, and a captive thought is dispersed in vast and boundless space.

Yes, it is long ago now. The old man has often rubbed his eyes as though it hurt him to see.

Have you noticed how the days are lengthening, and how light they are? You are resting in a bright room, and I walk carefully so as not to disturb you. You must sleep now—or are you asleep already? At last I can do what I couldn't do before, shade the light from outside so that it doesn't shine in your eyes, put a blanket over you so that you won't be cold. I am afraid of my words disturbing you, but then you are asleep already. Words are not disturbing. I wanted to brush my lips against your cheek, but the mere draught from my finger as it passed your forehead would wake you. It is only words that do not wake you. Are you afraid of memory, like an old man with a wrinkled face? No, why should you be, he is at peace somewhere, and you are not afraid of children. Why should we be afraid of the beginning and the end? It is only what lies between that appals us, the time that is between. You are not cold, are you? How it worries me that I can't lightly touch your skin without waking you. I mean it did worry me. But my words are touching you, and my thoughts. You're asleep now, I think, for now you are like a little child.

Our faith is a little child.

A child came walking along in the sun, stopping here and there, aimlessly, like a butterfly in flight. When she caught sight of me she began to run, fluttering her small chubby arms like a fledgeling in its first attempts at flight, wobbling against a tussock and clinging tightly to my legs, laughing and out of breath. I lifted her up in my arms. Her small feet were bare. We walked along the road, playing with sticks we found, playing tag and rolling about in the grass. Suddenly the child was silent and looked at me. Then it started asking all kinds of questions, what my name was, why I was walking along the road on my own, and where my mummy was. I answered as well as I could, changing the subject sometimes when at a loss for an answer. Her name was Bitte. I called her Summer Gold, but she didn't want to be called that, it was too long.

—Do you believe in God, she asked suddenly.

I replied hesitantly that I supposed I did.

—But where is he, do you know?

—No, I don't—that is, well, you see, God is up there in the sky and we can't see him.

—But of course we must be able to see him, she said. I can see mummy and daddy and Karo, can't I, so why shouldn't I see God. He's got a name, so we must be able to see him.

—Yes, of course. Where do you think God is, I asked.

—There. She pointed to the sky. God is the sun. And I can see God.

—What makes you think God is the sun?

—Because we can't live without God, and we can't live without the sun, so God must be the sun, mustn't he? And everything dies when the sun goes away, the flowers and the butterflies and the birds, and it gets so cold. Grandmother died too last time the sun went away. But when the sun comes back it wakens everything again so that it all comes to life. It does, doesn't it?

—Yes, it does, that's quite true. But if you mean you can see God, won't you be able to feel him as well, take him by the hand as you can with mummy and daddy?

—Yes, yes, of course. And I can too! Look, look here!

And she ran over to the ditch, crept down over the edge, picked something up and came running back triumphantly.

—Look! she cried, now I'm holding God by the hand, can't you see?

The chubby hand was clutching some coltsfoot.

—Yes, I see. Now you're holding God by the hand, yes, of course, now you're holding him by the hand. How stupid of me, and how wise of you, my little one. Summer Gold may I hold you by the hand too, as you are doing with God now? May I?

And I stretched out my hand towards hers, but the same instant she was gone, and I groped in the empty air. The sun was so dazzling that it hurt my eyes and made me blink.

You are sleeping peacefully now, just like a child. Are you dreaming? Have I myself been dreaming? Our dreams are like small Chinese boxes, the first contains the second and in the third is yet another. Like the rings made when a stone is dropped in the water. One box after the other is opened inwards, inwards towards the last one, towards the kernel, towards the dream that is asleep, in which we ourselves shall sleep, as tranquilly as the rose-petal pressed between the leaves of a book.

You are coming across the meadow from the lake, but you are walking in the sun's haze, and I cannot see your face. You walk slowly and lightly, as one does on a summer's day, when nothing is urgent except to linger where the ground is soft and hot and heavy with scents. You are holding a little child by the hand, her steps are uneven and she is clasping a bunch of coltsfoot, tightly and anxiously, as though someone wanted to snatch it away from her. But as you come to some newly-ploughed furrows you pick the child up and she puts her arms round your neck, not noticing that her grip has loosened and that one of the flowers drops into a furrow. There it lies like a fallen miniature sun shining in a black, billowing sea of sharp-edged waves where the furrows have petrified. Not long after, when you have both disappeared round a bend in the road, an old, wrinkled hand picks up the tiny fallen sun, holding it between its fingers like brittle glass. Then a wan shadow falls over the earth and twilight seeps through space like fine, airy rain. The precincts of memory grow by themselves into sources of eternity. But for a long time there is someone

awake in the house with the thorny lanterns, in the mighty silence.

The roads are open, and two people's hands sleep one within the other.

Never again will the meeting of two people be the same as it was then. When the pure, clear expectations relinquished their childish, clumsy thoughts and stepped firmly out to meet what was to come, simply because they wanted to. They knew all, they believed all, they wanted to give all, and gave it. They met at dawn, just when unreal dreams had been dispersed, when dark anticipation had not yet become an entity, but tarried still cool as the air in the shadow of the morning, sparkling like the dew-drops on the grass at break of day, joyful as the song of birds at the moment of annunciation.

So they met, with the unspoiled will not to be themselves, but just to be: by smoothing the road, by leaving all that was life and strength to someone else. Day will never be as bright as that dawn, no resting place so sacred, no prayer so serene. That time when words were concepts; when pure deeds reflected the clear well-spring of the heart; when one moment joined the next like a level, well-laid road, like a tree, the trunk of life bearing branches which are the years, the branches bearing twigs that are the months, down to the buds, newly opened to the light, which are the moments. And the sap's blood was the nourishment of the undefiled will. No tree ever flowered again as it did that time, when the tree was life and continuity. When its fruit was love, when everything was as it really is, as it should have been, when everything was the thing itself. Do you remember, do you remember? Faith's delicate cobweb sheltered from the wind, glistening in the dawn before the sun dried it up and the wind tore it in two.

Old man, I am not going to listen to what you relate of this, I want to listen to the calm voice of the eternal ones which transmutes tears and calls forth a smile at a miracle: which says, this is not you or anyone else, this has neither beginning nor end. This is, now and for ever. Too vast to be able to frighten, and too simple to be understood. This is the tree that grows during the night out of the mould of withered hopes.

This is the invisible continuity and the incomprehensible meaning. This is quiescence in our eternal home.

Old man, go out to the child who is playing in the meadow, take her on your knee and take the small hands in yours. Listen to what she says and tell her stories, grave and gay. Tell how Summer Gold saw the sun, how it feels to hold God by the hand. Then you must pick some coltsfoot, which can be put in a vase on the table. Show her all the beauty round about. But finally, last of all, you must say—without trying to teach or help—finally you must say and perhaps explain this:

But the loveliest thing on earth is humanity's sacred meeting in the dawn.

Our dreams are like small Chinese boxes. Have I the last in my hand, is this the innermost one revealing its bright pictures?

One July evening as it is getting dusk the call of the lapwing leads me from the grey dust of the highroad. The dry air, fresh and impregnated with the scent of damp earth and pungent berries, filters between the dark trunks, and through the trees is a gleam of light. Over near the edge of the wood the marshy ground opens up, first soft and springy, then with tussocks and a circle in the middle saturated with water. The long drawn out cry of a curlew rends the blank surface of the silence like the wake of a ship, vibrating long after in thin waves of sound. Cool and white, the mist rises like the earth's breath. Cool and white, far away from the highroad. The bell-heather rings in the wind, its soft clappers hidden in the red calices, rings out the hour for rest and sleep in the marshy ground's tranquillity. The night puts out with its dark rain the flickering candle-flames of waiting and enigma. The wood, growing denser, closes its black ring. The wind diminishes and dies, and the ringing of the bell-heather is hushed in the stillness of the marsh.

What more? An errant destiny is laid to rest in earth and water, and is covered over by the fen.

The earth's nest is open.

Softly now, the bird is asleep.

A FAIRY TALE

ULF PALME

(Translated from the Swedish by Alan Blair)

ONCE upon a time there was a girl who wanted to make a fire. For you see it was so cold in the land she lived in. It was the same land you and I live in. And in that land one must light a fire in order to exist—generally speaking.

But the fire would not light. She tried and tried, but alas, it only smoked and smoked, and her eyes grew more and more red, her cheeks more and more white, her hands more and more black. Poor little thing, she had a hard time of it, not as hard as you and I, of course, but all the same.

In the house where she lived there was a large, fat, kind man with small wicked eyes. He overheard her lamentation and found his way inside her little door. The room grew quite dark as he placed himself by the window and offered in a friendly way to help her. How amiable he was as he talked and laughed, and how oily his voice sounded. When he had gone the whole room seemed oily. She opened door and window to blow away his voice which hung tenaciously in the air. The draught was cleansing, but it left behind six words which she almost stumbled over: You must split sticks, you see! That is what he had done and now a cosy fire was burning in the hearth. He had thoroughly drummed this into her head: You must split sticks, you see!

So she went out into the cold autumn day and when she had wandered about for several hours under the spreading black branches wishing they were green, it occurred to her that that fat fellow had been quite nice in spite of having such wicked eyes and such fat, spongy hands. When she got home there were some flowers hanging on the door which were not nearly as beautiful as the roses in her cheeks. They were quite ugly in fact, green and yellow, slimy almost—curious flowers. She had never seen any like them before. But you and I have seen them. We have given them to each other as a New Year

present and the one who has had to accept them has . . . well, do you remember what you said: Orchids, oh how lovely! And how exotic! You were probably going to say something about their being erotic too, but before you had time to I said that they came from *Ålkistan*, and then we had a good laugh. However, these flowers were even uglier than usual, for they were given with an unclean heart, but the girl did not understand this, she only saw the little card which had on it in hand-printed letters: You must split sticks, you see!

Oh, how happy the girl was. Her eyes sparkled as she hummed: Split sticks, you see, split sticks, you see! How easy life was; she had found a key to her tangled life in the land which is so difficult to live in and where you and I also live although we have forgotten the key. It is more comfortable you see to leave it locked. After all, one can live without troubling to open it. As long as you and I can exist and just be as we are, why bother about locks and difficulties. We get on just as well by merely sitting, merely existing, don't we, eh.

Life for the girl was now a game and, feeling hungry, she went on humming and began taking tins and paper-bags out of her little pantry. She then had to light the fire, as it had gone out. Ah, but what did that matter, she knew she had the formula. Oh, how happy she was, never to feel cold again! And she began to believe that she really lived in a happy land. So she split a neat little heap, put it into the stove, and set light to it. Heigh, how it burned! Out with the saucepan! But soon the gay crackling ceased, and she discovered to her surprise that the stove was black, with only a few embers winking at her in the darkness like wicked eyes. She could not have split enough, she thought, so she took another lot, the whole stove full. Then it burned so that it really sang in the old stove-pipe, almost like the roaring or hissing of ravenous voices from an enraged and bloodthirsty mob. But as she was peeling the potatoes, she noticed that it was silent again, and it seemed to go plop in her stomach, it was like an old guitar-string snapping, or someone hitting a child. And she felt, at first quite faintly, a little sucking cry below her heart. But as it increased and she became conscious of it, she recognized the cry as dread, but she drove the thought away, just as you and

I have learnt to do, though we use pills, which she knew nothing of, poor little thing. However, she resumed her humming, and set to work again to split sticks. She chopped up the whole of her wood supply, and not until it was ready and a few drops of blood were burning on the white chips of wood was her mind at rest again. Now! Now she would have a fire! And she watched over it, wise with experience. But the dread returned with her inactivity. After a while the pile of sticks was used up and when she felt the potato-water it was barely hot. As she dipped her finger into it there had been a faint thought of: at least!— As she took it out there was no thought at all. There was only that ringing in her ears: You must split sticks, you see! Now her dread began to increase, it was no longer an undefined ache, it was a stone, pressing down, existing and floating round and inside itself. It was no longer a stone, it was never-ending plains that billowed and ached, it was no longer plains, it was black water with sharp reflections, water that became waves, waves that hissingly became one with her pulse and covered the top of her head in a mist of cold sweat. Her dread was no longer sea and waves, it was small feet pattering on dry leaves, small neat goblin-feet falling like tiny drops on to her neck and down her back. Her shouting eyes fell on several empty boxes standing in a corner. She chopped them up into firewood. She smashed a stool and split it up. Her torn hands brushed across her forehead to drive away the small pattering goblin-feet. They were bleeding birds entangled in her damp, matted hair. She smashed the table and split it up. For the water had begun to steam. But it would not boil. It would not. And there was still the certainty that had been drummed into her of an oily, kindly man. She knew she had the password, the key to warmth, light, life, and she gave a little whimper, or was it just her breathing? Hard to tell. If she had but screamed one could have known, but she merely whimpered, just a little.

When for the thousandth time she got up from her crouching position in front of the stove, there was a flickering before her eyes. The goblin-feet ceased pattering, the waves and the plains subsided. All round her was softness and light.

The huge kindly man found her dead on the floor. And in

her opened eyes you and I could have read a fairy tale—a fairy-tale about a bright and beautiful land where we can never go.

But then we don't bother our heads about it very much—for that matter.

TWO POEMS

by ULF PALME

A voice whispers that I must sail with clean sails,
someone says that I am to sail with clean sails.
And so my ship shall be steered towards desolate seas.
Do you grasp it? Desolate seas! And there my sails will be washed.

The way of the lonely lies across utterly desolate seas
where there is no wind to fill his grimy canvas.
My canvas hangs heavily in this desolate sea
where the great washing happens in its vast immobility.
So forgive me beloved because of my solitude.
No doubt you can see my hand raised in farewell
as gently and gratefully as the branch of a tree
bows and waves in a suddenly fortunate spring breeze
that causes the sap to swell for a moment
before someone whispers in the icy stillness of my night
that henceforth I must sail with perfectly clean sails.

* * * *

My unseeing hands are groping
towards the light of your eyes
oh dearest dearest mortal child,
groping through the dusky forests
towards the light of your eyes.

In quiet quiet nights
and brightly shining days
my two hands are fumbling
blindly blindly dear one.

(Translated from the Swedish by Alan Blair)

THE TOWER AND THE FOUNTAIN,

STIG DAGERMAN

(Translated from the Swedish by Alan Blair)

ONE Monday about twelve as he was on his way down from the bell-tower, he heard a car slow down and stop up on the road. He remained standing in the red dust on the bottom step listening. But he could hear nothing. Only the drone of the bumble-bees bouncing among the roses in the convent garden. In the distance, at least several kilometres away, a reaping-machine was chattering like a discontented bird. But there was no sound of a car-door being slammed or of people striding down the path towards the outer wall. They must be still sitting in the car, he thought, going out into the rose-walk. He put on his cap, which he had been carrying in his hand, and rubbed at a button that had lost its shine, twisting it up and spitting on it, but only a little. There was a feeling of well-being in the air. There were no tourists reeking of sweat and tobacco, and sometimes liquor, drifting unwillingly along the paths swinging their cameras and scattering ice-cream wrappings and cigarette ends all round them. He spent Sunday evenings clearing up; this made Mondays blessed days, days of cleanliness, tranquillity and solitude. Gently and carefully, so as not to spoil the crease in his trousers, he knelt in front of the fountain in the soft, newly-raked grass. It was his usual Monday ritual; he didn't worship the fountain, he offered up his shadow to it, bending over the hard, cold mirror and looking into it as into his own eye.

As he went out through the broken arch there was a completely new dignity in his movements. After the humiliating Saturdays and Sundays, when he was ordered about here and there by hysterical school-mistresses or sour excursion leaders who hated the sight of convent ruins more than anything else, the convent became his again. He could walk round and caress

the shrubs, sit down on the uneven floor up in the tower and dream, looking out over the soft undulations of the plain through the narrow slits in the tower, or lie prostrate over the fountain and immerse his shadow in it. If any visitor turned up at the convent on a Monday he blamed himself. He was sparing with his words, the information he did give was scanty and uttered in a harsh tone of voice, and as he felt that every step he took was guarded the visit never lasted long.

From the outer arch a narrow path enclosed by roses and briars led up to the road. In the spring before people started coming, a carpet of dark green grass was unrolled over this path. It was nice to walk through it barefoot; at that time of year there would only be an occasional cyclist pedalling through the countryside who would glance indifferently down at the convent walls, still grey and bare before the spring had had time to throw a mantle over them. It was a time, a very short time while the leaves were bursting out, when the convent was entirely his, not only on Mondays; The Public came later. He used to shut himself up in the tower and scourge himself with thoughts of The Public. The Public was an ogre which ate the grass, dropped paper, plundered the roses, defiled the water, bellowed with laughter on a full stomach, and mishandled the old stonework. During the season he was The Public's humble servant; only on Mondays was he Its master, treating It with the supercilious respect of a tamer handling a lion.

So when The Public tooted the horn of Its car from up on the road, to which he was leisurely but surely making his way, he slowed down, taking time to throw away a tin full of rain-water which was wedged in a brier-bush. Even after he had passed the bend and saw the car from the front, new and shining, with its lowered hood, headlamps like arrogant eyes, and dark tyres that looked as if they had driven for a long time through water, he still kept his dignified composure. The two young men behind the windscreen were sitting so still that it made him think of a shop-window he had seen last time he was in town: two window-dummies in broad-shouldered suits. He had merely smiled at them and hurried on.

But now all he could do was walk up to them. Behind the

young men's bare heads he glimpsed two fluttering female hats. He became defiant and uneasy; it was always the young men with cars and young women who wrought the worst havoc, picking roses for their girl-friends' dresses, interrupting his Narration by giggling and swearing, lagging behind in the tower and biting their womenfolk's ear-lobes while he was still standing with his foot on the top step. Suddenly the young man at the wheel frowned and thumped the horn violently with his clenched fist. The whole plain shook with the sudden clamour. He leaned out of the car and looked at the old man with gloomy determination.

—Hallo old buzzard, he yelled hoarsely and stridently, what's this old dump here?

The 'old buzzard' stopped, placing himself right in front of the radiator, and looking away over the car as though it didn't exist. In the distance where the avenue of the estate linked up with the highway a large bus was rolling out of a cloud of dust. Full of foreboding, he dried the sweat from his forehead and looked down at his shoes. The four young people in the car were no doubt thinking he was playing them up.

—Blasted peasants, the second youth said, lighting a cigarette, to hell with them! He flipped the burning match over the windscreen. It was a hostile move by The Public. The old man ground it into the gravel. He knew exactly what would happen if he let them in. Cigarette ends, giggling, cuddling, flowers trampled down, roses stolen. The bus was getting nearer and nearer. Like a fortress on wheels, sent out by The Public to conquer his territory, it came growling towards him, huge and mighty, stirring up dust and spurting gravel over the roadside. He quickly took his cap off in the hope that he wouldn't be recognized. And it did help, the bus didn't even slow down, the gravel rattling against the side of the car. The dust poured over the lot of them. He gave a sigh of relief and put on his cap.

—The Convent of Convents, he said.

—The Convent of Convents, repeated one of the americanized youths. He set about twisting the steering-wheel so that the front wheels kept changing direction. It made the old man completely confused. Their way of addressing him in a strange

accent confused him too. He was ensnared in their superiority. They were no doubt sitting contemplating some devilry in silence. It felt just like a Saturday. The Convent of Convents. Well, what was he to say? There were people who thought it sounded silly and smirked when he answered their question, just as if he was the one who had hit on it. For his part he thought it sounded reassuring: O Convent of all Convents. Something like that. ~

But the girls in the back seat were in fits of laughter. Their hats went up in the air and they laughed until they choked. The youth at the wheel broke into a grin, put on some green sun-glasses and turned round.

—Hallo, darling, he said, what are you laughing for?

—Yes, what the hell are you laughing at, the sullen youth said, flicking his cigarette over the windscreen.

The girl with the blue hat grabbed the sullen one's wrist and put it in her mouth to check her laughter. The youth at the wheel half rose from the seat and lightly slapped the one who was still laughing across the mouth. She stopped.

—Tell me, darling, he said, sitting down again.

—I only said that the old chap stammered, the girl said peevishly.

—The Convent of Convents, said the other.

But none of them thought it was funny any longer. The old man, who was still standing in the road in front of the radiator, grew red with indignation. He was used to The Public looking down on him, stealing roses from his garden, littering his paths, contaminating his fountain, yes even interrupting him with stupid questions in the middle of his Narration, but when The Public laughed like this right in his face, they were going too far. He put his feet apart and drove them down into the road like props. If the car started he would stay where he was! He could see himself lying run over on the road with his body imprinted with wheel-marks and The Public, filled with respect for the dead, kneeling at his side and trying in vain to feel his pulse. But the car didn't move, it remained standing by the roadside with its brake on and its motor silent. The youth with the sun-glasses threw open the door and spat on the gravel.

—Come on, boys, he said, let's go and get ourselves a nun.

The sullen one lighted another cigarette, the flame blown by the wind singed his slim moustache.

—Okay, Joe, he said with a grimace, just a minute please.

—The Convent of Convents, said the girl who wanted to make them laugh.

She didn't succeed this time either. They all got out. The girls put their picture hats on the front seat. They frizzed up their hair with whipping fingers, like whipping up cake-mixture.

—Do you think there are any nice monks, said the girl who had simply got to make them laugh.

The old man stood rooted in the gravel and watched The Public file past without deigning to look at him and with rapturous foreign-sounding cries disappear into the brier bushes. He hadn't been able to defend himself because he hadn't been attacked. The high-pitched girlish laughter, shrill and ominous as the blast from an enemy's bugle, which had penetrated up to the road, suddenly became muffled and dim. They were walking through the arch. The reaping-machine was silent, it was probably having its lunch. The road creeping over the plain lay empty and free from dust as far as the eye could see. Everything was like a Monday, everything could have been as usual if only the car hadn't stopped there. Suddenly, he noticed how it smelt, an acrid stench of burnt rubber and exhaust fumes. The headlamps scowled ominously, the framework crouched on the wheels, ready to spring. All at once his feet freed themselves from the road almost of their own accord and his wrath against those who had ruined his Monday exploded in a violent kick against one of the front wheels.

Before he went back down to the convent he looked round carefully, but no one had seen him. Even from a distance he heard them shrieking and laughing in the convent garden. He stood for a moment loitering by the arch while he collected all that was left of his pride and his contempt for The Public. Adjusted his cap until it sat at the most dignified angle, dusted his shoes with a sprig of leaves, wiped the sweat from his glistening face. A Guide strode in through the arch.

He found them sitting by the Abbess's Stone. The girl who wanted so much to make the others laugh was sitting on the sullen youth's knee. She had taken her shoes off and was drawing with her toe nails in the abbess's sand. They were smoking a cigarette in turns. The girl had a rose in her hair. She had not had it when they left the car. The other couple was sitting with their backs to the convent garden throwing broken matches on to the cross-path. They heard him coming and looked up.

—The Convent of Convents, said the girl who sat on the man's knee. She tried to laugh but it misfired.

He stopped right in front of them and gave them a long, morose look like a tourist guide. Suddenly he stretched out his arm and pointed at them, his stiffly extended forefinger as threatening as a gun-barrel. The four on the stone looked back at him stupefied.

—The stone you're sitting on, the old man said, is the one which has come to be known by the name of the Abbess's Stone. When in December, 1404, the convent was besieged by brigands the story is that the abbess of the Convent of Convents who ruled this stronghold of our Christian faith with a sure and steady hand ordered one of the gates to be opened and proclaimed that anyone who forced his way into the precincts of the convent would be struck down by the wrath of the Lord and changed into a stone. Their chieftain who, according to legend was known as Sigmund the Biter because on one occasion he was said to have put an enemy to death by biting his throat . . .

The surly youth pushed the girl off his knee and spat out his cigarette into a rose bush. He turned his head and looked at Sun-glasses.

—Twaddle, he said.

—Too much talk, said Sun-glasses with a frown.

—How nasty, said the girl who wanted to make people laugh. She was sitting in an indecent posture on the ground putting on her shoes. Biting blokes' throats. Did he have false teeth?

—Too much talk, said Sun-glasses, pinching his girl's arm. She was just lighting a cigarette, and threw the empty

scrunched-up packet high in the air in the direction of the dormitory.

—Aow, let the old boy blather, she said, biting her friend's cheek.

—Anyhow, the old man went on, Sigmund the Biter has the impudence to laugh, and walks in alone through the convent gate which you see down there behind the roses. Then the abbess raises her hand, the brigand falls headlong to the ground in the courtyard of the convent, and his men, who are on the point of following their leader, retreat terrified. Where Sigmund had fallen a stone grew up out of the ground, the very stone you are sitting on, ladies and gentlemen.

—Oh Jesus, said the surly youth, getting up. He was obviously impressed and looked at the stone with an interest which even in his distress pleased the old man.

—Do you believe in all that stuff, said the driver's aristocratic girl friend with a yawn.

—You talk too much, said the driver, taking off his sunglasses.

To see what would happen he began walking down towards the dormitory, straining his ears back the whole time to hear if anyone was following him. For a moment there was complete silence. Feet scraped on the path, still uncertain of which direction to take. However, they did come after him, reluctantly and mumbling sultrily. He stopped and turned, surveying the group. He riveted his eyes on each one of them and found to his amazement that he controlled them. They had accepted him as leader. They were instruments on which he could play his songs of praise. He immediately began tuning them. Tentatively took a few more steps in the direction of the dormitory. They followed close behind them.

—This is the dormitory, he said, stopping in front of a grassy mound that had caved in and left bits of wall sticking up, softly rounded by time. The grass caressed the worn, almost grey bricks of the floor.

—What tripe, the sullen youth said, what was the name of the dump?

The girl who wanted so much to laugh began giggling. He became frightened again. If he paused for a second they would

get the better of him. They would tear themselves loose from his grasp and swarm like grasshoppers over his blossoming stones, destroying them. Not for a second must the lion-tamer take his eyes from the lion's. He started to cough so as to regain their attention.

—This is where the nuns slept and—

He lowered his voice almost to a whisper and stepped into the shadow of a sloping wall as though what he was about to say was not the kind of thing that could be said in the sun. He was silent. The young people came slowly towards him with listlessly inquisitive faces. The stratagem worked.

—And, he added, and here just where we're standing now was a trapdoor now covered up leading down to an underground passage and the story goes that numerous monks from a nearby monastery used this passage to pay nightly visits to the sleeping nuns.

—Tough guys, said the sullen one approvingly.

—Tough guys, said Sun-glasses reverently.

The aristocratic girl said nothing, but poked her tongue out at her friend. The girl who wanted to make people laugh said, however:

—What a hard bed. For the nuns, I mean.

But the trapdoor was a lie. He had long ago discovered that the visitor got more out of his tour through the convent if he saw and heard what he really wanted to see and hear. The other parts of the convent didn't give so many opportunities for variation, but as far as the dormitory was concerned there was ample chance of satisfying even the most diverse tastes. He had invented the trapdoor and secret passage for the benefit of elderly, frustrated gentlemen. He had never before made use of them when ladies were present and he didn't like doing so, but the lion-tamer does not choose his facial expression.

—So that one can remove the stones then, pull up the trapdoor, and crawl down into the passage?

It was the driver's girl-friend asking.

—Yes, he answered. Yes, of course.

Of course she had no intention of doing so, but still it made him uneasy. It was as if she had turned over his pretty lie to

see what it was like underneath: dirty, cold, and clammy. It had never happened to him before. Quickly he conducted them out of the dormitory. At a furious speed he led them through the remaining sections. Anxious in case they should stay on and destroy what was left of his Monday he was already on his way out with the silent adolescents close at his heels, not having let them climb up into the bell-tower. Just as he was conducting them past the fountain, which lay clear and shining, dark with the shadows of the roses, the idea came to him to look back and make sure that his intention to drive The Public out of the garden was succeeding. He stopped dead.

—Where is the rest of the party, he asked.

—Sss, they went up into that tower, answered the girl who had tried to be funny, giggling in an insolent and embarrassed way.

—They've just got engaged, the sullen youth explained sullenly.

—The tower, the old man said, there's a most remarkable story told about the tower. When in the year 1426 . . .

He was already on his way across the cloisters. It was awful to have to go back when he had been so near to success. He had a feeling that a catastrophe would happen if he didn't get there in time. He was so upset that he didn't even bother to see if the other two were following him. Wet through with perspiration he stood on his own beneath the west aperture listening upwards. Hearing nothing he crept in through the door. It was firmly shut and gave a faint creak. Furious at not having oiled the hinges when he had had the chance, he stood for a moment on the bottom step peering up into the darkness. Then he thought he heard mysterious sounds coming from the invisible platform where the bell had once hung, sounds which tallied all too well with the scene which was no doubt being enacted several metres above him in the darkness.

Carefully he began the ascent, pausing for a long time on each step and listening. No further sound. Perhaps they had heard the door creak and afraid of being discovered were keeping quiet. He continued upwards, his cheeks burning. The common creatures, he thought, they won't half get it when I catch them. At the eighth step the stairs curved sharply. The

curve ended at the twelfth step and from there one could see straight up into the room of the tower. At the tenth step he stopped, a significant pause during which he tried to charge himself with anger. Out they go, he thought. No pardon given here. But it was a strong thought with a weak body, and it collapsed fainting inside his head. He had no feeling of rage, only a tingling desire to sneak on upwards, one step at a time. It was that desire and not wrath which lifted his hot, heavy body up to step number twelve. There he stood for a moment blinking at the sun which streamed in through the south aperture. At first he could neither see nor hear anything. Aha, they're lying on the floor, he thought, how shameless.

Then his foot struck a loose stone. There was a clatter, not particularly loud, but quite loud enough to make him feel how frightened he was of being discovered, what an uneasy conscience the guardian of the tower had as he approached its occupants. In order to remove the unpleasant impression of being detected he gave a cough and making a noise with his feet went on into the room. It was empty. No one could have escaped through the narrow apertures. No one could have stolen past him in the dark on the stairs. The truth was that the tower had been empty the whole time. He peeped out across the garden and noticed to his pained amazement that any relief was completely lacking. All that was left was a feeling that best deserved to be buried, the feeling that he had been duped. Bury it he did, carefully, and began to smile, at first feebly and unfamiliarly, then more contentedly.

His contentment didn't last so very long, however. There was something disquieting about the convent's silence. He strained his ears until it seemed to go click inside his head, but he couldn't hear a single voice. Nor was there any sound of a car door banging or an engine starting. He couldn't see anyone either, the four young people seemed swallowed up by the rose bushes.

At last, after waiting a long time, there was a sound quite near at hand, to be more exact from the bottom of the tower, a sound which made him give a start and full of evil presentiments rush down the stairs and throw himself against the door. It was locked. Pressed against the door in a vain attempt to

make it open, he could hear several subdued voices immediately outside and then a loud, pitiless girl's laugh.

—Open the door, he begged, do please, let me out. I can't stay in here.

But the callous adolescents didn't even answer. He ran up into the tower and looked out. Then he saw them standing in a chattering cluster by the fountain. The girl who laughed said something he didn't catch and a violent burst of laughter which frightened the birds and set the roses quivering exploded from their throats. Then they all turned suddenly and came towards him. They stopped beneath the aperture and looked up but evidently didn't see him. The youth with the sun-glasses pursed his lips. The unheard-of happened. He whistled up to the prisoner.

—Hallo, old buzzard, he called, hope you feel well!

The driver's girl-friend with the carelessly buttoned dress had an armful of roses like a huge bridal bouquet. Suddenly she broke off a bloom, took aim and threw, but it landed to the side of the aperture and fell down again.

But he was no longer looking out. He was kneeling with his eyes shut and his hands over his ears, so he didn't hear the surly youth call out:

—Shall we send a nun up to you, if you're feeling lonely?

He had already heard enough. He pressed his hands to his ears with the strength of despair but The Public's salvoes of laughter penetrated to his ears even beneath the flesh of his palms. At last, however, he could hear nothing. At long last he opened his eyes, got up, brushed his knees, looked out. He gazed and gazed until the tears streamed out of his eyes in wave after wave without being able to blot out the last frightful sight which The Public offered him: the sullen youth was standing by himself in front of the fountain with his back to him and his legs wide apart, polluting the fountain in such an awful way that it meant the fountain's death. With clenched fists he beat against the walls of the tower, but with all certainty no one heard this other than himself. He fell on his knees, too, then on his back, and rolling round in the room of the tower uttered small screams of rage, which, however, were more like sighs.

Suddenly he gave a start and then lay quite still, roused by a sharp, triumphant sound: the noise of a car-horn. Then the aggressive roar of an engine. Then a long, sucking, stinging noise: rubber tyres on wet asphalt. It was raining outside, a gentle summer rain. Finally, silence. He rolled forward to the stairs without even daring to give a fleeting glance through any of the apertures. In his imagination the ravaging of paradise took on such terrible proportions that he felt that his eyes wouldn't be able to bear the sight without bursting. Knotted with hatred of the collective enemy which had dealt him such a fearful blow he sat for a long time in the dark on the bottom step of the stairs. He wanted to blow up, he wanted to explode into little bits with such tremendous force that the tower in which he was imprisoned might also disintegrate and bury the whole of this polluted convent beneath its atoms. But he didn't blow up. The body, the only merciful friend we have to help us against the unmerciful soul, finally came to his rescue, even if only for the time being. He felt suddenly tired, dead tired, and sank into a doze.

Loud voices roused him. At first they made no impression on him. They might just as well have been the noise of an aeroplane or heavy rain beating against the walls. He glanced up the stairs. It seemed to be lighter, perhaps the sun was shining. However, he was very uncomfortable the way he was sitting, and it was out of sheer discomfort, and not fear or loneliness, that he called out:

—Hallo out there! Will you unlock the door please. I've got shut in.

The voices were silent; no, they began whispering. Feet approached hesitatingly. Suddenly the door was thrown open. Light poured in. He remained sitting on the step, staring up sheepishly into the faces of two elderly ladies. Retired school teachers. But they didn't interest him. What he did find so extraordinary was the fact that they had simply pulled the door open without turning the key. So he hadn't been locked in. The young things had crept back and unlocked the door while he had been stopping his ears. Now he was sitting here like an idiot. It is when the martyr discovers that strictly speaking he does not deserve his martyrdom that he first begins to hate.

In the presence of two representatives of the hateful Public which had ruined him in a single afternoon and made his whole existence as worthless as a cheque with nothing to meet it, he rose from the step with tightly compressed lips and burning cheeks. The faces he looked into were narrow and sharp-nosed. It was a privilege to hate such faces.

—What an odd fellow, said one of the retired school teachers. She was hard of hearing and whispered in a painfully loud voice. She had a book in her hand and her forefinger was thrust into it about half-way as a bookmark. Suddenly they both pushed past him relentlessly and beetled up the stairs. Being purposeful tourists they didn't let themselves be deterred by such an insignificant obstacle. Driven by his hate and his sense of duty he followed them, and while still on the stairs began a discourse on the tower.

—When in the year 1426 an army commanded by a Smålander by the name of Whitefoot besieged the convent, he said—

They were now up in the room of the tower. The deaf one, who had turned her back on him the whole time, suddenly swung round and looked at him with implacable disbelief.

—That's where you're wrong, she said, it was in reality 1446. Kindly remember that!

It was the first time such a thing had happened. Never before had The Public hurled its doubts right in his face. Mocked he had been, but disbelieved? Never! They went down again. In the dormitory he saw his big chance, his chance of revenge which would never come again if he didn't seize it now. They were standing in the same grass-grown angle of the bricks where he had lately been with the four adolescents. He looked down at the floor, darkly and bitterly. One of the two retired school teachers gave a slight cough. The one who was hard of hearing turned a page of her book, stuck her finger in, and shut it again.

—You see this brick floor, ladies, he said. Lying here in the old dormitory where the chaste nuns slept it looks so safe and innocent. (He raised his voice.) But in reality it is nothing but an enormous bluff. The bricks were put down at a later date to conceal the painful fact that a network of underground passages

led up into the dormitory, covered only by trapdoors. These passages had been dug by hard-working monks, possibly the industrious nuns had also done their bit, and they had met half-way. Be that as it may, is it very difficult for those of a later age to imagine on what errand the members of the nearby monastery hurried through their underground passages, finally to climb up into the nuns' dormitory?

There came no answer to this rhetorical question. The one hard of hearing whispered in a roar to her colleague:

—The wretch is lying. The nearest monastery lay thirty miles from here on the other side of deep lakes and high mountains. There were no drills at that time. Nobel wasn't thought of and gunpowder only just. The fellow's lying!

They left him to his fate. He stood for a moment by himself in the corner while he came to a terrible decision. He caught them up. They were already on their way out.

—Ladies, he begged, let me just show you something worth seeing which you would otherwise miss.

He conducted them up to the fountain. They broke into cries of rapture. So clear. So pure. So virgin. The time had come.

—Clear, he exclaimed, pure! (He snorted with laughter and desperation.) Pure, this pool where the boys on their school outings piddle. Fifty per cent urine, on my honour!

The deaf one goggled at him.

—And he tries to make an old school teacher believe that, she hissed. Come Theresia! The fellow has very poor taste. He ought to read the book instead of talking nonsense.

—The book, he said, completely squashed. Which book?

—The guide book about the convent, of course, she said. Everyone should get themselves a copy and they would be spared all your misleading information.

He froze. All at once The Public's ruthlessness was made so hideously clear that the whole world round him grew leaden-grey as before a rainstorm. It wasn't enough that The Public trampled his grass, wore down his stones, pilfered his roses, littered his paths, made water in his fountain. It wanted to make him superfluous as well. It intended to walk beside him with a book in Its hand and laugh in his face, laugh at his

ignorance, so that It could finally say: My good man, we don't need you any longer. We have a book now. You can go.

The one who was not hard of hearing, a little moved by the sudden change that had come over him, said awkwardly:

—We have two books. You can have one of them.

Then he looked round in such a lost way that they both felt sorry for him. Their eyes strayed round the garden. A shy glance at the fountain. So he said:

—No thank you. I don't need one.

A long pause. Then a stammered:

—I, I'll go now. But ladies, go to the tower. There you will see something remarkable on the bottom step. When you leave double-lock the door so as no hooligans will get in while I am gone. Good afternoon.

He disappeared. Screened by the rose bushes he ran towards the tower, opened the door, rushed up the stairs, and threw himself down on the floor. After a while he heard voices. The door closed again. The key was turned. Once. Twice. They hadn't even bothered to look at the bottom step. Of so little consequence was he. It was bitter. When no voices could be heard any longer he went slowly and gently down the stairs and sat right at the bottom, not thinking of anything in particular, feeling no special anger. Felt nothing really. Thought of nothing. Not even of the fountain. Just sat there hour after hour or it might have been light-year after light-year getting more and more tired. Tiredness is very good, tiredness is always good, especially good when one is learning the bitter art of being one's own prisoner. Great poise and a certain capacity for not allowing oneself to get worked up are also very good, for in order to be able to endure himself Man must have very strong nerves.

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

CONVERSATION IN SICILY. ELIO VITTORINI. Translated by WILFRED DAVID with an introduction by STEPHEN SPENDER. London, Lindsay Drummond and Wilfrid David. 8s. 6d. net.

WE are now becoming used to a new version of Italy. It is taking the place of the version done by the pre-Raphaelites and Browning and the generations of aesthetes who sought a magic garden where they could revel in the past and escape from our harsher industrial civilization. The new view has been widely propagated by Italian films such as *Città Aperta*, *Sciuscià*, and *Paisà*—amongst those of us who did not witness the crisis of Italian life personally during the late war. We now have opportunities to be interested in Italy in a realist rather than a romantic and detached way, to understand something about the country from the inside. I remember one evening last year walking in Milan with Montale the poet. He pointed his arm to the high and blackened buildings of the street we were following and said that Milan meant to him what he supposed Manchester meant to me. That, anyway, is how a lot of Milanese see Milan. And in the same way a lot of Sicilians see Sicily in terms of poverty and police enemies (Vittorini's two characters Moustache and No-Moustache), and the struggle to emigrate, to get beyond the closed doors of the Americas. There are far too many inhabitants on the rocky island and nothing like enough fish, oil, and bread to go round. That, not the nymphs and Theocritus, is what Sicilians talk about.

Sicily isn't at all 'Italian' in landscape or manners, if we take as our Italian standard some kind of Tuscan ideal in which St. Francis of Assisi and Dante and the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation all play their part in our mind picture. I can only think of two writers who have brought that sun-baked earth to life. One is Giovanni Verga—the Verga who wrote *Mastro Don Gesualdo* and *Cavalleria Rusticana*, not the Milanese Verga: the other is Elio

Vittorini. (I am omitting Pirandello owing to a perhaps personal prejudice, though Pirandello wrote some excellent Sicilian short stories.) Verga was late nineteenth century, Vittorini is wholly contemporary, yet between them they tell us much of the 'island of fire', of the ferocious terms in which existence presents itself to its inhabitants, first with ancient traditions into which Christianity hardly penetrated, then in terms of the break-up of those traditions, of the landless toilers hoping for a way out.

Vittorini has close links with the American novelists whom he has translated into Italian. There are unmistakeable accents both of Faulkner and of Hemingway in *Conversation in Sicily*, especially Faulkner. But there is nothing artificial or merely imitative in this, nor does one get a feeling that an inappropriate medium is being used—as, for instance, in Jean-Paul Sartre's trilogy of French life where one is too conscious of the machinery, too conscious, to take Sartre's own words, that Europeans took to writing American novels because they could no longer import them from America and the need for them remained. If Vittorini at times reminds us of the heat, the arid landscapes and the distorted perspectives of Faulkner's deep South, this is because there is something similar in the realities reflected. There is a certain link of homelessness between the Negroes and poor whites of the Southern states on the one side and on the other Vittorini's Sicilians with their ragged jacket collars turned up for warmth, standing on the wintry ferry between Reggio (Calabria) and Messina, or in the crowded corridors of the long trains with their flapping curtains. The descriptions, on page after page, have the cohesiveness, the fusion of words into a new whole that we associate with genuine poetry—and of a high quality at that. But when we land at Messina Vittorini does not take us to see Southern Baroque art, but the prickly pears and the orange groves or the railways on which his father worked. And the passion for the suffering of humanity is not—anyway here—introduced in a propagandistic or external way. It is expressed, as the author's personality, in the fully 'digested' medium of art.

Vittorini is about the same age as Alberto Moravia, some-

what younger than Corrado Alvaro and Carlo Levi (to mention other Italian writers who are coming to be known in England). He belongs, that is, to the generation whose childhood memories are of the first world war, whose boyhood coincided with the rise of Fascism and whose early creative years were lived under the dictatorship. And then, while still relatively young, he experienced the crack up of the Fascist edifice. The reversal of values—at least of publicly professed values—caused a psychological situation in Italy that cannot be described easily in English or American terms. Yet if we want to find the real explanation of the ‘inspiration’ of some of the younger Italian writers, as of the film directors, we must, I suspect, look somewhere here.

Vittorini is now in the full tide of his career, and he has produced a number of novels since the early *Conversation in Sicily*. Since the war he has also edited a periodical called *Politecnico* whose aim was to create a kind of Communist humanism. Several years ago in that paper he published a famous ‘Open Letter to Palmiro Togliatti’, a protest against the Communist attitude to the arts and an assertion of the significance and worth of modern masters from Joyce to Virginia Woolf. He has also collaborated with Sartre’s review *Les Temps Modernes* in France. Several of his novels have been translated into French. This is the first translation of Vittorini into English, and the workmanship, by Wilfrid David, is wholly to be commended. Vittorini’s difficult Italian has been rendered in a lucid and colloquial version. There are no foreign locutions yet Mr. David has preserved all the warmth and colour of the original.

BERNARD WALL

THE ANCIENT MARINER AND THE AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE. BERNARD MARTIN. Heinemann. 7s. 6d.

The Ancient Mariner belongs to that very small group of longer poems that can be said to be of public, and not merely of literary, interest. Consequently, any study that purports to throw new light on its origins is something of a public matter, and for that reason I shall consider Mr. Bernard Martin’s book in as much detail as space permits.

The sources of Coleridge's ballad have already been extensively explored, notably, of course, by Professor Livingstone Lowes, and it seems probable that most of the machinery of the poem has now been identified. Mr. Martin's claim is that the morality and psychology of *The Ancient Mariner* were largely determined by John Newton's *Authentic Narrative*, a series of autobiographical letters first published in 1764. These relate how Newton renounced his ungodly ways when, in 1748, the vessel on which he was 'volunteer and Captain's commander' was driven willy-nilly about the Atlantic for a period of several days. Mr. Martin prints relevant extracts as an appendix, and very interesting they are, too.

Now this mere statement of Newton's subject is sufficient to establish a very broad analogy, the theme of repentance on the stormy ocean. I wonder whether the whole argument really amounts to anything more than that. The *Authentic Narrative* account comes to just this: young Newton, who was, he says, 'exceedingly vile indeed,' left H.M.S. *Harwich* and joined the *Greyhound* which was bound for Africa on a trading expedition. His life on the outward journey remained 'a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness', and led the captain of the *Greyhound* to regard him as a kind of Jonah. At length the vessel turned for home, travelling via Brazil and Newfoundland, but on 16th March it ran into storms of alarming violence and was kept afloat only by the unremitting efforts of its crew, or, as Newton subsequently concluded, by help sent from above. When the storm abated, they found that most of their provisions had been washed overboard, and that progress was slow because most of the sails had been blown away. They approached land, as they thought, only to find that 'we had been prodigal of our bread and brandy too hastily: our land was literally *in nubibus*'. And so, for another fortnight, they were driven about the ocean 'to the northward of Ireland'. Here they were in unfamiliar waters: 'it may, indeed, be questioned, whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean, at the same season of the year.' In the end they reached Ireland and anchored in Lough Swilly, where they discovered that even their water supplies were very much smaller than they had supposed.

For Newton himself these events were decisive. Immediately prior to the disaster, he read *The Imitation of Christ* 'as if it was entirely a romance', but then he began to wonder: 'What if these things should be true?' In the midst of his peril, he called on God and attempted prayer, at first without success. When his captain blamed him for the calamity, 'I thought it very probable, that all that had befallen us was on my account,' and 'when, at last, the ship came safely to port, he was a changed man: 'From this period I could no more make a mock at sin, or jest with holy things; I no more questioned the truth of scripture, or lost a sense of the rebukes of conscience.'

The very broad analogy that we have already admitted remains, and the question that now arises is whether these details suffice to narrow it down. Mr. Martin believes that they do, and offers us his evidence. First of all he presents nine parallels of thought and expression, and of these eight seem to me to add up to precisely nothing. As a representative sample of the kind of 'parallel' adduced, we may take the following:

'Newton's comrades thought they saw some small islands but, "our fancied islands began to grow red from the approach of the sun, which soon rose just under it."

*No dim, no red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprised.'*

The exception is the similarity between 'It may indeed be questioned, whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean . . .' and

We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent Sea.

Even this is more apparent than real. The sentiment, after all, is a common one, and Newton makes no stronger claim than that they were possibly 'the very first that had been in that part of the ocean, *at the same season of the year*'.

There is, of course, plenty of room for coincidence. Sea voyages are liable to fall into a simple dichotomic pattern. The sea is either rough or not rough, the weather calm or not calm, the vessel wrecked or not wrecked, and so forth. With

sailing vessels, in particular, a certain cause almost inevitably yields a certain series of effects. It is not surprising, then, that the experiences of Newton and his crew should be roughly similar to those of the Ancient Mariner and his fellows. They are not without parallel in Homer and Virgil. And much the same holds good of religious conversions of the kind operative in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Newton's reclamation may recall that of the Ancient Mariner, but scarcely more palpably than that of John Bunyan, as described in *Grace Abounding*—and what goes for Bunyan goes for hundreds of reclaimed minor sectarians, for those who are suddenly shown the light invariably exaggerate the enormity of their previous apprenticeship to Satan.

I am not convinced, then, that Newton's experiences are inevitably linked with those of the Ancient Mariner. However, Mr. Martin does not press external resemblances but emphasizes what he terms the 'psychological fundamentals' which he presents as four main parallels: the nature of the crime, the attitude of the crew to the crime, the repentance, the effects of the repentance. Newton's crime was blasphemy, that of the Mariner 'nothing less than the wilful destruction of a messenger from God. It is a crucifying of Christ; or at least something akin to Blasphemy as understood in Dr. Johnson's time.' These are but wild and whirling words. Surely Coleridge knew the Greek roots of the word 'blasphemy', and surely he had in mind from the first some crime similar to that which came to him from Shelvocke via Wordsworth. There is nothing in the poem to suggest that the Mariner ever had been a blasphemer in the Newtonian sense. The albatross is more important than Mr. Martin allows.

The second parallel is no stronger. The Mariner's shipmates at first condemned the crime but afterwards applauded it: Newton's behaviour made him a leader of the crew, but afterwards he was denounced (by his captain) as a Jonah. But what of this? And what of the third parallel—repentance? Both men have a sense of being Christ-forsaken: the Mariner because he conceived (in the *Lyrical Ballads* version) that

... Christ would take no pity on
My soul in agony.

Newton because he read *The Imitation of Christ* 'as if it was entirely a romance.'

There seems little point in going further with Mr. Martin's arguments, for they are imaginary geese and never real albatrosses. I read the chapters in which he presents his case with increasing scepticism, but then, turning to his excerpts from Newton, I came to feel that a case may exist, though not a very strong one. Mr. Martin does not prove that Coleridge was acquainted with the *Authentic Narrative*; and Coleridge's claim that he had read 'almost everything' is neither here nor there. However, the fact that the Wordsworths had certainly read it counts for something, and the balance of probability is in favour of Coleridge having perused it. Hence, though Mr. Martin's evidence moves me not at all, I do not insist that he has merely discovered a mare's nest. There may have been stray recollections of the *Authentic Narrative* flitting through Coleridge's mind when he composed *The Ancient Mariner*, but I cannot believe that they were very lively ones or very important ones. That they constitute 'psychological fundamentals' seems improbable, for did not Coleridge evolve a subtle psychology of his own? Even less convincing is the suggestion that they were responsible for the morality of the poem, simply because that morality is demonstrably Coleridge's own, and perceptible in a body of poetry whose quality may be variable but whose moral and intellectual unity is unimpeachable.

In announcing this book, the publishers informed some of us that 'it is only now . . . that what is obviously Coleridge's true inspiration for *The Ancient Mariner* is at last revealed', that 'this was the material which had inspired Coleridge', that 'Mr. Martin . . . proves his point'. There seems to be little between the covers of this book to justify such claims. Some one has blundered, and in doing so has done Mr. Martin, who, whatever his failings, is never pretentious, no very great service.

J. M. NOSWORTHY

APE AND ESSENCE. ALDOUS HUXLEY. Chatto and Windus.

7s. 6d.

THE BODY. WILLIAM SANSOM. The Hogarth Press. 9s. 6d. The novel has been so strained and expanded within the last thirty years that it has now become usual to assess a work appearing under that title not as a novel but as that still more loosely defined thing, a book. What sort of a book is it? Good, bad, or in between? And the word, novel, on the jacket is a guarantee that the book is fiction which has attained a certain minimum length. It is risky to read anything more into the word than that. The reviewer, then, confronted by these protean shapes tends to avoid attempts to place any one novel in a wider category and plays the safer game of saying what the book is about.

Mr. Huxley would be content with this treatment. At least as far as *Ape and Essence* is concerned, since its shape is so loose and unsatisfying that he cannot have regarded it as anything more than a kind of improvised stringbag to contain his weighty ideas about the state of the world. The main part of the book is in the form of a film-script discovered by the narrator and a friend as it rolls off a lorry full of rejected scripts on their way from a Hollywood studio to the incinerator. The scene of the script is the same Californian city two hundred years from now when the Third World War has destroyed it with 'The Thing', the atomic holocaust. One can only suppose that Mr. Huxley chose the script-form on the analogy that, while in a film you can get away with almost anything, the script would similarly induce a 'suspension of disbelief' in the reader and help him to accept the fantasies without too much revulsion. We cannot think that the author used this device to gain a degree of objectivity for his beliefs by ascribing them to William Tallis, the supposed writer of the script; even at two or three removes they would have easily been recognized by the Huxley mark on them. In this Not-So-Brave New World, Evil has triumphed and Belial, the Old Man Himself, has the ball at his feet. '... it becomes increasingly obvious that the great Metropolis is a ghost town, that what was once the world's largest oasis is now its greatest agglomeration of ruins in a waste land.' But worse than the

destruction is the terrible degeneration of the human beings. The aftermath rays, radio-active gases and so on have attacked the seed of life itself and have caused terrifying physical mutations in the human species. Their moral degeneration is even worse; they are now regimented by a hierarchy of Evil with Belial's, or Moloch's, Arch-Vicar at the head. There is only one Angel in the book, a scientist, Doctor Poole who is a member of the Re-DiScovey Expedition from New Zealand—one of the few areas that have escaped. He gets kidnapped by the Molochites and we see the rites of the New Order through Doctor Poole's eyes. Here the Huxley satire has its head but its effect is spoiled by the frequent apish grimaces that take out a good deal of its bite. How does the script end? Doctor Poole gets mixed up, in spite of a powerful mother-fixation, with a near-angel of the Molochites, and they make a bid to escape to where another community, presumably not so evil, still survives. But this ending of the book is the author's gesture to convention. The book really ends a few pages earlier when the essential problem posed in the novel is brought to its climax. There is, though, precious little essence here; what there is is mostly a dirge on the inadequacy of Man with thoughts on the assassination of Gandhi as an anacrusis. This is the author's solution. (Doctor Poole and his Loola are speaking):

'And, remember, He (Belial) can never win for good.'
'Why not?'

'Because He can never resist the temptation of carrying evil to the limit. And whenever evil is carried to the limit, it always destroys itself. After which the Order of Things comes to the surface again.'

'But that's far away in the future.'

'For the world, yes. But not for single individuals, not for you or me, for example. Whatever Belial may have done with the rest of the world, you and I can always work with the Order of Things, not against it.'

We infer from this that Mr. Huxley has given us all up, to Belial or whoever happens to come along; and he would have the few remaining angels weep on one another's shoulders and take heart, like Poole and Loola, in nicely aired couples.

The scene of *The Body*, too, is in the desert; one of present-

day London's suburbs. Mr. Sansom's novel is as tightly knit as Mr. Huxley's is loose; it has the inner tension of a very well constructed short story. The theme is jealousy: Henry Bishop is out in his garden and, unobserved, notices a neighbour, Charlie Diver, staring up at the bathroom window while his wife is washing herself. Out of this small incident he weaves a subjective pattern of guilt and intrigue; and the need to prove his wife's unfaithfulness, to catch her with her lover, becomes the motive force of his life. He makes elaborate plans, attempts to set the scene for an open act of infidelity, lowers himself to rummaging among other people's belongings and finally proves nothing, unless it is that even an obsession is more desirable than the boredom of a humdrum marriage in the setting of a middle-class suburban home. It is a very convincing picture of a jealous man and the clinical, obsessional atmosphere in the book is deepened by letting the victim tell the story himself. We get inside his head, and so well does the author manage things that we do not question the overall truth of the husband's premises; the wife is already condemned and our concern is to see how the husband catches her out. His dark flitting bats come back home to roost in his own head, and at the end he is a poorer man for the loss of his neurosis. The tautness of the story and the nervous vigour of the writing suits the theme perfectly, but occasionally one feels that the detailed description of the minute, as in the first scene when Henry Bishop is in the garden mysteriously injecting a fly with a syringe, makes the narrative too tense. The suggestive symbol which in a short story serves as a small lens opening to a wide and implicit tract of country, is perhaps apt in a longer work to give the prose a potential too high to be sustained.

GEORGE EWART-EVANS

THE GRAND DESIGN. JOHN DOS PASSOS. John Lehmann.
10s. 6d.

SINCE 1920, when Dos Passos brought out in England his first novel, *One Man's Initiation*, the aesthete in his literary character has been struggling with the revolutionary, the artist with the writer of documentary, and it must be admitted that, in his

most effective works—*Manhattan Transfer* and the trilogy *U.S.A.*, it is the revolutionary and the writer of documentary who triumphs.

Grand Design finds even revolution exhausting. It is the work of a tired, disgruntled liberal; a writer who sets out to repeat his old speeches and finds himself echoing the speeches of his opponents, who longs to practise un-American literary activities, and succumbs to the cult of perfect Americanism. But, whatever new weaknesses may have developed in Dos Passos' thought, and whatever old weaknesses may persist in his technique as a novelist, he is still the greatest of all writers of documentary.

This is the historical novel whose history is our own times; flat when considered as novel, for there are so many characters and each of them is so stylized that none of them can have room to breathe or develop into reality, but magnificent as history: the earnest effort, the frustration, the success, and the disaster of Washington under the New Deal described as no history-book has yet described it.

With this book a new hero enters the Dos Passos canon. Franklin Roosevelt, though he is always just out of the reader's view, is the one complete personality in the book. His influence is everywhere: upon government ('We had in government to-day . . . the most well-intentioned crowd of people since the very early days of Washington and Jefferson'), upon big business, upon the sinister group of Communists and upon the private lives of individuals. Any reader who knows anything of contemporary American politics must suspect portraiture in other character-studies. Walker Watson, for example, successful in everything but his ambitions to achieve the highest office, has in his career and in his character so many similarities to an eminent politician that the fictional framework is unconvincing. And the stigmata of actual events are so impressed into *The Grand Design* that there is little chance to see the novel.

But Dos Passos has narrative powers beyond the hopes of most contemporary novelists, and can handle his own peculiar technique far more skilfully than any of his minor imitators. In Washington, more than anywhere else in the world,

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government is the daily life of the people, and in consequence Dos Passos' emphasis upon public responsibility for private consequence is more convincing when he writes of Washington that it would be were he to write of other cities. Even Washington contains Americans who are not obsessed with politics or administration, who think for themselves without dancing to the puppet strings of politicians or radio-commentators, for whom the deeper sentiments are more important than business conferences, who would be disinclined to commit suicide but would rather die for love than for party-politics. Dos Passos ignores them, and so skilful is his method that, while reading *The Grand Design*, it is easy to believe that they do not exist.

J. E. MORPURGO

TWO DESERTS

ELEGIES FOR THE DEAD IN CYRENAICA. HAMISH HENDERSON. Lehmann. 6s.

BEYOND THE TERMINUS OF STARS. HUGO MANNING. Phoenix Press. 5s.

THE desert of Mr. Henderson is 'brutal', 'Necrophilous'; a 'limitless shaggy lion-pelt', 'Malevolent bomb-thumped'; it has an 'unsearchable . . . moron monotony' is an 'imbecile wasteland' which is the common enemy of the fighting men of both sides celebrated in these astringent elegies.

Mr. Manning

'Weeps with the angels,
Sees God's broken heart.'

in a wasteland which was explored and mapped much more thoroughly by Mr. Eliot years ago.

Both deserts are recognizable, but Mr. Eliot brought the clear vision and understanding, which accompanies Mr. Henderson throughout, to a wasteland Mr. Manning blurs under a shower of clichés and worn epithets:

'What new life stirs in the womb of pain
Here in time's empire where another end may start?
O cold, cold is the way of purpose;
Flow blood of words through this frozen plain.

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What captive song then will shatter its bars
Before faith and meanings fall apart,
Before our skull may glitter in greater darkness,
Flower and breath as the white tempest of stars?

And there are echoes of other poets too insistent to be passed over without comment:

'I am the punctual prologue in your narrative of change,
The serpent in your blood, the knocking in your womb.
I am the hungry worm in the tissues of your torpor,
The knife of your desires, the clock in your room.'

And this, for instance:—

'I danced with a prince to a musical saw.
I am Lola: dead roots of fire;
Graduated in Lisbon at a cabaret of tourists,
Then shipped to Rio by a masterful papa.'

brings us back to the familiar land once more. And indeed there are times when this—the Ninth—poem makes me wonder—uneasily perhaps—whether I am reading the rankest of imitations or a poor skit on the original:

'Others, others;
O where can they be now, where
O where are my beasts and babies?
Voices of nothing, torn flower of dreams,
Weep for me, woo me
Like a dead guitar.'

Mr. Henderson's *Elegies*, however, stand alone. He is allusive without being imitative and the book is something more than a *tour de force* about battle; it is poetry in its own right. And yet I find it difficult to imagine the same verbal construction and ruthless pruning of all but a suggestion of nostalgia and current (i.e. 'popular') emotion, ever being used to describe other things successfully. Just as Mr. Eliot got his *Waste Land* once and for all, so Mr. Henderson has captured desert warfare. Mr. Eliot spoke for his age; Mr. Henderson speaks for that often wordless 'eternally wronged proletariat'—the dead of both sides in the conflict.

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'... laughing couples at the tea-dance ?
ignore their memory, the memoirs almost slight them
and the queue forming up to see Rangers play Celtic
forms up without thought to those dead.'

For in this brutish desert of Mr. Henderson's

'There are many dead . . .
who lie uneasy
among the scrub in this landscape of half-wit
stunted ill-will.'

and when the Jocks move forward:

'... hill and shieling
sea-lock and island, hear it, the yell
of your war-pipes . . .

It flaunts
aggression to the sullen desert. It mounts. It's scream
tops the valkyrie, tops the colossal
artillery.'

I do not think it can be done again. Only the senseless slaughter, misery and boredom is repetitive. And I am left wondering what will be Mr. Henderson's development. Will he write more poetry? Or has the white heat of those desert encounters burnt it out? Will he find an absolution in the past as Cafavy (to whom he alludes more than once), or seek it in the present—in what may prove to be a wasteland as hideous as the one he has described?

Of one thing only am I certain: Mr. Henderson's elegies will suffer no imitators. His desert will deal as harshly and effectively with unentitled interlopers as does Mr. Eliot's.

DENIS BOTTERILL

TIME WILL DARKEN IT. WILLIAM MAXWELL. Faber.
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THERE is no flaw in the telling of this small-town family-affair chronicle. At first one feels sad, for small faults might explain away some of the larger dissatisfaction. Can it be one is bored—simply bored—by an editor of the *New Yorker*? It seems incredible and inescapable until one realizes the theme and the cunning. Out-growth is the key. The protagonist outgrows the

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conventional portrait of himself as someone who can easily distinguish his attitudes and reactions: and the author's plan is to tempt the reader to outgrow the book! We can't, he says in effect, make life by our conventional expectation of its pattern or a novel—those who would live and those who would read must revolt.

Here is a trap such as one might imagine the *New Yorker* would set. To welcome this novel would be to deny its lesson: to reject is to suggest the lesson is trivial. What can one say? That, superficially, one does get caught through a languid spell of curiosity, and that finally one is sorry when the book ends although left wondering if sorrow ought to have been born so near the end? Or that one's own outgrowth of accustomed charity, expertly encouraged, brings a new single pity for small-town lives, for writers and readers of such books?

At risk of horrifying the author, I would say—read *Time Will Darken It!* On the other hand, I expect the author's triumph—that this may be the last small-town family chronicle you ever do read.

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